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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**  
FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
School of Humanities

**Hume's Conception of Character**

by

**Robert Heath Mahoney**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

Doctor of Philosophy

HUME'S CONCEPTION OF CHARACTER

by Robert Heath Mahoney

The thesis reconstructs Hume's conception of character. Character is not just an ethical concern in Hume's philosophy: Hume emphasises the importance of character in his ethics, aesthetics and history. The reconstruction therefore pays attention to Hume's usage of the concept of character in his clearly philosophical works, the *Treatise of Human Nature* and the two *Enquiries*, as well as his less obviously philosophical works, the *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* and the *History of England*.

The first main thesis is that Hume's conception of character includes multiple heterogeneous elements. These include passions, habits, natural abilities and possibly general rules. These elements are combined to form a coherent character through social organisation and conventions. The elements underpin character attributions, but it is argued that Hume is not concerned with identifying elements with character traits, as he is interested in characters as a whole rather than individual traits.

The second main thesis is that the character of judges is central to Hume's philosophy. Hume's most sustained character of a judge is to be found in the essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Close examination of this essay with particular attention to the character of the true judge reveals that such judges should not be conceived of as ideal, as some commentators on the essay have supposed. It is further argued that the true judge can be used, with some modifications, as a template for the moral judge, which Hume requires for his moral philosophy but never fully articulates.

The two theses are mutually supporting in that the judges examined in accord with the second thesis are conceived of in terms of the first thesis, i.e. they are conceived of by Hume as characters constituted by heterogeneous elements. The first thesis receives support from the second thesis, as the reality of the elements supposed in the first thesis is undermined by a failure to appreciate the importance of judges as characters in Hume's philosophy.

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# Declaration of Authorship

I, **Robert Heath Mahoney**, declare that the thesis entitled

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and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- no part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- no part of this thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

**Signed:** .....

**Dated:** .....

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# Abbreviations

- DNR    *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, ed. John C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- EHU    *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Citations are given according to section and paragraph (universal reference), and are followed by page numbers referring to *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- EPM    *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Citations are given according to section and paragraph (universal reference), and are followed by page numbers referring to *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- Essays    *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised edition, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).
- H        *The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, 6 Vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983). Citations are given according to volume and page number.
- ST        “Of the Standard of Taste” in *Essays*. This abbreviation is only used in Chapter Four.
- T        *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2 Vols., ed. David F. Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Citations are given according to book, part, section and paragraph (universal reference), and are followed by page numbers referring to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).



# Introduction

Of all the concepts that take a central place in Hume's thought, character is one of the most obscure, partially owing to the casual manner in which he uses the term. In the case of other key concepts, such as sympathy or moral sentiment, he gives an account of what he intends by the term, albeit often not as clearly as we might wish. In the case of character there is no clear case of his having explained the concept. Instead Hume approaches character as if it requires no technical elucidation, as if the concept is entirely transparent. Yet, Hume's use of the concept of character is far from transparent; it stands in need of a technical elucidation.

While there are some papers dedicated specifically to the interpretation of Hume's use of the concept of character, and many books on Hume mention it in passing, it is relatively uncommon to find a fully worked-out account of what it is that Hume means by character. Views on Hume's conception of character range from those that take a strong metaphysical line,<sup>1</sup> to those who think that questions concerning character have to be completely detached from Hume's metaphysical and epistemological scepticism.<sup>2</sup> There are commentators who emphasise the relationship between Hume's theory of the passions and his conception of character,<sup>3</sup> and those who draw attention to character as a construct or social

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<sup>1</sup> For example, John Bricke, "Hume's Conception of Character," in *David Hume: Critical Assessments*, ed. Stanley Tweyman, vol. 5 (London: Routledge, 1995); Clarence S. Johnson, "Hume on Character, Action and Causal Necessity," *Auslegung* 16, no. 2 (1990). Some of the expressions in Rachael M. Kydd, *Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 190-93, also imply a strongly metaphysical account, although Kydd dismisses "character-dispositions" as unimportant to Hume's ethics.

<sup>2</sup> For example, David F. Norton, *David Hume: Common Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 116-20; Susan M. Purviance, "The Moral Self and the Indirect Passions," *Hume Studies* 23, no. 2 (1997); and Eugenio Lecaldano, "The Passions, Character, and the Self in Hume," *Hume Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002). Note that all these three take strong metaphysical approaches to the moral self, but they reject the attempt to reconcile it with (in particular) Book One of the *Treatise*.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Jane L. McIntyre, "Character: A Humean Account," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*

phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> The topic of Hume's conception of character is clearly of some interest, but when compared to the degree of interest there is in Hume's philosophy as a whole it is apparent that character receives relatively little attention.

Even when character is one of the central concepts of a particular commentary, it is common to find it being treated as an assumption or a given of Hume's philosophy rather than a concept that needs to be elucidated. William Davie, for example, defends the relevance of the concept of character in Hume's ethics in his paper "Hume on Morality, Action, and Character." Having considered various cases in which the evaluation of actions appears to be more ethically pertinent than the evaluation of character, he concludes, "the contexts in which we assess actions alone are such that an individual might get through large segments of his life without encountering them... [M]oral assessments of persons are more essential to moral life than assessments of actions are." But rather than giving serious consideration to how Hume may explain this moral commitment, Davie suggests, "We assume the presence of a coherent and enduring self," before finally concluding, "What is wonderful about Hume is that he can remain stubbornly faithful to the facts about moral life even where his own theory of knowledge gets in the way."<sup>5</sup> I sympathise with Davies' sentiment here, Hume's rich descriptions of social and moral life are compelling and he maintains them even where it would be easier to ignore them, but it seems rather hasty to give up the question. Hume's philosophy contains many observations and resources that might explain his commitment to character, without rendering it a mere assumption.

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7, no. 2 (1990); and Pauline Chazan, "Pride, Virtue and Self-Hood: A reconstruction of Hume," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (1992).

<sup>4</sup> For example, Annette C. Baier, "Hume on Heaps and Bundles," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979); Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 174-97; Simon Blackburn, "Hume on the Mezzanine Level," *Hume Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993); Timothy M. Costelloe, "Beauty, Morals, and Hume's Conception of Character," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2004); and Timothy M. Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals in the Philosophy of David Hume* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 53-73.

<sup>5</sup> William Davie, "Hume on Morality, Action, and Character," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1985): 347.

It might be expected that Hume's conception of character has received comparatively little attention because it is only a peripheral interest of his, appearing in one or two passages but not elsewhere. This is far from being the case. Hume places character at the centre of his ethical theory:

If any action be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality. (T 3.3.1.4; 575)

It is referred to at one of the crucial points in his aesthetics:

[A] true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character: Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty. (Essays 241)

And it features as an important factor in his doctrine of the passions:

Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others. (T 2.1.11.1; 316)

Hume also makes frequent references to character in his *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*. For example, in a passage from the essay 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', he wrote,

By *Priests*, I here mean only the pretenders to power and dominion, and to a superior sanctity of character, distinct from virtue and good morals. These are very different from *clergymen*, who are set apart *by the laws*, to the care of sacred matter, and to the conducting our public devotions with greater decency and order. There is no rank of men more to be respected than the latter. (Essays 619b (Note to 75))<sup>6</sup>

In 'The Sceptic', Hume suggests,

The fabric and constitution of our mind no more depends on choice, than that of

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<sup>6</sup> This passage only appeared in some editions (1748-1760) after which it was removed.

our body. [E]ven upon the wise and thoughtful, nature has a prodigious influence; nor is it always in a man's power, by the utmost art and industry, to correct his temper, and attain that virtuous character, to which he aspires. (Essays 168-9)

He wrote an essay entitled 'Of National Characters', the main subject of which Hume characterises as follows:

The human mind is of a very imitative nature... Where a number of men are united into one political body, the occasions of their intercourse must be so frequent, for defence, commerce, and government, that, together with the same speech or language, they must acquire a resemblance in their manners, and have a common or national character, as well as a personal one, peculiar to each individual. (Essays 202-3)

There is also the short 'A Character of Sir Robert Walpole', written when Walpole was "in the Zenith of his Power" (Essays 574n), but later treated with reservations and eventually dropped. Hume's bemoans the partiality of writing on Walpole:

I wish for the honour of our country, that any one character of him had been drawn with such *judgment* and *impartiality*, as to have some credit with posterity, and to shew, that our liberty has, once at least, been employed to good purpose. (Essays 575)

Such a project of drawing impartial characters of political figures is carried through in his *History of England* where many sections end with 'Death and Character.' Of these the most infamous is that of Charles I, of whom Hume writes,

The character of this prince, as that of most men, if not all men, was mixed; but his virtues predominated extremely above his vices, or, more properly speaking, his imperfections: For scarce any of his faults rose to that pitch as to merit the appellation of vices. (H 5:542)

The attempt at impartiality did Hume little good, as he comments in his autobiographical *My Own Life*,

I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation; English, Scotch, and Irish, Whig and Tory, churchman and sectary, freethinker and religionist, patriot and courtier, united in their rage against the man, who had presumed to shed a generous tear for the fate of Charles I. (Essays, xxxvii)

And *My Own Life* even concludes "historically" with a self-drawn character sketch (Essays, xl-xli).

Such a gamut of quotation may strike some as excessive, but it shows that Hume's concern with character was neither trivial nor momentary. It endures through all of his works, from the youthful but very clearly philosophical *Treatise*, to the mature but less obviously philosophical *History*, making an appearance at every intervening stage. The ubiquity of concern about character in Hume's work shows it to be as significant a concept as any in his work, with the possible exception of cause and effect.

Why then did Hume never give technical precision to the concept of character? This question does not seem to admit of a simple answer. It is possible that he inherited his conception of character from his predecessors, thinking that they had given it sufficient technical articulation to spare him the trouble of doing so himself, but this would be rather strange, given that many elements of Hume's philosophy are adopted from predecessors, including the structure of his account of ideas and their association from Locke, and his doctrine of moral sense from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, and yet he found space to detail them in the *Treatise* and elsewhere. Indeed, even though Hume did adopt such elements from predecessors, he rarely did so without modifying them to suit his own purposes.<sup>7</sup> A more likely explanation is that Hume was rather careless in his use of the word 'character', for the simple reason that he failed to recognise that there was a serious question to be answered with respect to its status. This is unfortunate, but it should not be taken to be a strong cause either for censure or objection to Hume's theories. In the case of censure it is quite clear from the history of philosophy that concepts that have been taken for granted by philosophers in one century have become the subject of controversy for those of the next. It would thus be necessary to censure much of the history of philosophy if we took overlooking the significance of certain terms to be unduly censurable and would amount to a degree of arrogance on our own part. In the case of objection it would be rash to object before we have attempted, so far as is possible, to get a clear understanding of what the term may mean.

To see the problem of the potential ambiguity in the word 'character' it is worth

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<sup>7</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). See particularly Part 1, Chapters II & III.

stepping back from Hume for a moment and investigating some other sources. The *Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>8</sup> lists 18 uses for the word character, all of which could have been familiar to Hume.<sup>9</sup> Of these senses, seven refer to writing, e.g. character as a symbol or mark, two indicate features or characteristics of things in general, while the remainder refer to the characteristics or qualities of a person or the description thereof. We are thus left with nine senses from the *OED* which could apply to Hume's usage with respect to persons, with the added complication that at times he may be using the word as a shorter version of 'characteristic' or referring to writing. Similarly, Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1756, a few years after the publication of Hume's *Enquiries*, lists eight uses of 'character', three of which refer to writing and the remainder to personal qualities.<sup>10</sup> 'Character' is clearly not unambiguous.

Of course, these dictionary references are of little help when trying to pin down the philosophical use of such a word. One respect in which they are unhelpful is that they fail to show, in themselves, how character differs from, say, personality. Joel Kupperman has attempted to distinguish these by pointing out that "the word *character* is less concerned with distinctiveness and individuality than the word *personality*."<sup>11</sup> This is undoubtedly true, except perhaps in the sense used to indicate eccentricity, but it does little to clarify what kinds of things are included in the consideration of the one as opposed to the other. Although 'character' is not particularly a matter of individuality – Hume talks of the character of nations and

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<sup>8</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., "character, n.," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50036832> (accessed September 19, 2009). Henceforth *OED*.

<sup>9</sup> In their primary usage. Subsidiary uses, such as the computing sense of 'character' would obviously have been unavailable to Hume, but this is a subsidiary use of "3. A graphic symbol", which dates from the early fifteenth-century. The 18<sup>th</sup> sense given by the *OED*, "An odd, extraordinary, or eccentric person," is dated to the late eighteenth-century (quotation from 1773) and thus is highly unlikely to feature in Hume's work.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, explained in their different meanings...*, 2 vols. (London, 1756): 1:169, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> (accessed February 15, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Joel Kupperman, *Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6. See the rest of the first chapter for an interesting discussion of the concept of character in general.

professions – we do not normally consider something to be a part of someone’s character if it is (near) universal. It may be, of course, that character and personality treat of the same subject matter but with a different focus. “Plainly,” observes Kupperman, “it is the moral overtones of the word *character* that make it of such great interest to ethical philosophers.”<sup>12</sup> This is, again, a key point. ‘Character’ is a word with significant moral overtones, but again it is not necessarily of much help here. It is already clear that Hume uses the word in a moral sense. The question is *how* he uses it, both in a moral sense and other senses.

It seems, therefore, that character is not an easy thing to understand, either in terms of its general everyday use or in philosophical terms. This is to be borne in mind for the following study for two reasons. First, ‘character’ permits of sufficient ambiguity that Hume’s lack of clarity in his usage is regrettable but unsurprising. This reinforces the point concerning undue censure mentioned above. Second, it is possible that coming to an understanding of how Hume uses character will contribute to our contemporary understanding of character. Indeed, it is possible that Hume has been influential on other philosophers or on modern usage, although this is not something for which I have evidence, nor is the search for such evidence within the scope of this study.<sup>13</sup> The present study will focus chiefly on the works of Hume himself and the uses of character therein. It is thus largely a historical study. The historical focus does not exclude the possibility that Hume’s ideas are in need of revision at points. There will be occasions in the following thesis where it is necessary to distinguish between what Hume actually said and what he, perhaps, ought to have said. Neither does the historical nature of the study mean it is of purely historical interest. There is current, lively debate concerning the status of character in philosophy, as Kupperman’s work illustrates, along with the more recent *Lack of Character* by John Doris,<sup>14</sup> not to mention the abundance of research

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<sup>12</sup> Kupperman, *Character*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> For an argument that there may be some influence along these lines, see Jerome B. Schneewind, “The Misfortunes of Virtue,” *Ethics* 101, no. 1 (1990).

<sup>14</sup> John M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). I discuss Doris’ book in the Conclusion. Doris is just one example of a debate between character-based ethics and situationism.

being undertaken in the field of virtue ethics. It is surely of significance to discover the views of a great philosopher on such a hotly-debated issue. In addition, Hume is regularly (mis)appropriated by philosophers as either an ally or a foe. If, as I argue, Hume's position on character is significant for interpretation of his views, then an understanding of his position on character is significant for assessing the legitimacy of such appropriations. Finally, there are many debates, metaphysical, ethical, meta-ethical and aesthetical, in which people still take Humean positions.<sup>15</sup> A fully worked-out account of a great philosopher's position should be of interest to these contemporary concerns.

In the chapters that follow I will establish two main theses. The first is that character, on Hume's account, consists of heterogeneous elements, including passions, habits, natural abilities and possibly general rules. These heterogeneous elements come together to form a whole character owing to the socially embedded nature of character. The second thesis is that the character of the judge is just as central to Hume's philosophy as the character of the judged. That is to say, Hume is explicit that he considers character to be the focus of moral judgement, but, while he is equally committed to the claim that the character of the judge is central to the process of evaluation, the latter is not a point he makes so explicitly. This second thesis requires a close attention to judges in Hume's philosophy as *characters*, which are developed in accordance with the first thesis.

In Chapter One, I consider various key themes in Hume's usage of the concept of character. I argue that the best place to begin an examination of his usage of the concept is by looking at his arguments concerning free will in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. From examination of these sections I derive three conditions, which I claim any interpretation of Hume's

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<sup>15</sup> I have distinguished 'Humean positions' from the philosophical appropriation of Hume owing to the fact that 'Humean' has taken on a life of its own in modern philosophy. At times, 'Humean' is only very distantly related to the philosopher himself and it is no stretch to believe that some modern positions held in Hume's name would be anathema to him. This observation notwithstanding, it remains the case that many Humean positions will have an interest in what Hume himself thought. For a more detailed discussion, see Elijah Millgram, "Was Hume a Humean?" *Hume Studies* 21, no. 1 (1995).



conception of character should fulfil. The chapter closes with an evaluation of John Bricke's account of Hume's conception of character as an example of how the three conditions can be used.

Having developed the three conditions in Chapter One, I go on in Chapter Two to consider the elements that contribute to character on Hume's account. I consider the interpretation offered by Jane McIntyre that character is, on Hume's account, best understood in terms of the passions. I argue that while McIntyre's account fulfils all three conditions established in Chapter One, it does not suffice to explain many of Hume's comments on character, particularly when it is appreciated that character is a concept with a wide application to different areas of Hume's thought. I proceed to examine various other elements, including natural abilities, habits and general rules that can be seen as important for Hume's conception of character. The result is a conception of character as consisting of heterogeneous elements in a bundle.

Chapter Three begins by rebutting an objection to one of the three conditions developed in Chapter One. This objection stems from the work of Timothy Costelloe, who argues that character is akin to a secondary property. My rebuttal also introduces the second thesis, that the character of the judge is central to Hume's conception of character, although further elucidation of this point is left for Chapters Four and Five. The remainder of Chapter Three is devoted to explaining how we can have knowledge of character through its social manifestations, focusing particularly on conventions.

The centrality of the judge in Hume's aesthetics is the central focus of Chapter Four. I argue that Hume gives a character specification for the true judge in his essay 'Of the Standard of Taste'. This character specification aligns with the first thesis, in that it is given in terms of several different elements that comprise the true judge's character. From the examination of the true judge as a character I draw several interesting conclusions about Hume's aesthetics, which engage with a number of debates concerning Hume's aesthetics and 'Of the Standard of Taste' in particular.

In the final chapter, I consider the character of the moral judge. I argue that the moral judge can be modelled on the template of the true judge as developed in Chapter Four. It is not possible, however, to transfer the true judge directly from the aesthetic case to the moral case. Moral judgements need to be considerably more accessible than aesthetic judgements, but there are reasons to think that moral judges may be even rarer than true judges. I argue that these complications can be overcome.

The first three chapters can be seen as developing my interpretation of Hume's conception of character, while the final two chapters show how my interpretation can be applied. It is not appropriate to consider this as two separate parts as the two main theses do not map onto this division. The first thesis is mainly developed in Chapters Two and Three, while the second thesis is introduced in Chapter Three and elaborated in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter One lays the groundwork for both theses and from the very beginning introduces an important theme of the thesis as a whole: the manifold ways in which Hume uses character throughout his works.

# Chapter One

## Three Conditions

Hume's use of the concept of character is highly complex and spread throughout his works. This chapter will begin examining some of Hume's manifold uses of character. Moving on from this it will be argued that the best place to begin analysis is in the sections 'Of Liberty and Necessity' in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. From these sections are derived three basic conditions that any interpretation of Hume on character must fulfil: one metaphysical, one epistemological, and one practical. These conditions are not the only constraints upon an interpretation of Hume in this matter, but they are some of the most fundamental. As such it is reasonable to suppose that any interpretation of Hume on character should fulfil them.<sup>16</sup> In this chapter they are each given an initial characterisation that will be developed as the study proceeds. To illustrate these conditions in practice, the chapter closes with a discussion of John Bricke's interpretation of Hume on character. It is shown that Bricke's account fulfils both the metaphysical and epistemological conditions, but fails the practical condition. However, the framework that Bricke provides is taken forward as a working model for development.

### Hume's Manifold Uses of Character: Key Themes

One of the most apparent ways in which Hume uses character is as the cause of actions and passions. He talks of actions as 'flowing from' character (T 2.3.1.10; 403), as "proceed[ing]... from some cause in the characters and disposition of the person," (T 2.3.2.6; 411 & EHU 8.29; 98) and as depending, "upon durable principles of the mind, which... enter into the personal character." (T 3.3.1.4; 575)

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<sup>16</sup> I do not make this claim dogmatically. In Chapter Three I will consider the views of Timothy Costelloe, who explicitly rejects the metaphysical condition. I there defend the metaphysical condition from Costelloe's arguments against it.

“Characters... have a uniformity in their influence,” (EHU 8.11; 86) and this influence is shown both through actions and through the passions to which a person is susceptible: “People of this character [delicacy of passion: an extreme sensibility to all the accidents of life] have, no doubt, more lively enjoyments, as well as more pungent sorrows, than men of cool and sedate tempers.” (Essays 3-4) In a similar vein he extols strength of mind as, “the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent... according to the *general* character or *present* disposition of the person.” (T 2.3.3.10; 418)<sup>17</sup>

In the ‘delicacy of passion’ quotation, character is associated with temper, which is a typical, but not invariable, connection made by Hume. As early as Book One of the *Treatise* Hume talks about our character as showing itself in dreams in these terms, “The generosity, or baseness of our temper, our meekness or cruelty, our courage or pusillanimity, influence the fictions of the imagination with the most unbounded liberty,” (T 1.4.3.1; 219) which also shows a causal understanding of character in the context of imagination. On the other hand, in Book Two he declares, “a hasty temper, tho’ a constant cause in the mind, operates only by intervals, and infects not the whole character,” (T 2.3.2.7; 412) implying that temper is a part of character rather than identical with it.<sup>18</sup>

Character can be an effect as well as a cause: “[T]he great force of custom and education... mould the human mind from its infancy and form it into a fixed and established character.” (EHU 8.11; 86) This modification of character can also be deliberate: “[A] person, who feels his heart [naturally] devoid of [a virtuous motive]... may perform the action without the motive... in order to acquire [it] by practice.” (T 3.2.1.8; 479) Hume includes nature among the causes of character. “We become acquainted with the different characters nature has impressed upon the sexes,” and also upon people of different ages (EHU 8.11; 86). The prevalence of nature is even considered to be so great as to render it “almost impossible for the

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<sup>17</sup> I have swapped the order of the sentences here for convenience. The distinction between the calm and the violent passions is introduced at T 2.1.1.3; 276 and is briefly discussed in Chapter Two (p. 52).

<sup>18</sup> Hume’s puzzling exclusion of a hasty temper is discussed in Chapter Two (p. 55).

mind to change its character in any considerable article, or cure itself of a passionate or splenetic temper, when they are natural to it.” (T 3.3.4.3; 608)

Not all of Hume’s talk of character is causal. In some contexts he aligns character with reputation. During the discussion of pride and humility he observes, “Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight,” (T 2.1.11.1; 316) and as a motivating factor in his discussion of justice Hume argues, “There is nothing... on which our reputation more depends than our conduct, with relation to the property of others. For this reason, every one, who has any regard to his character... must never violate those principles.” (T 3.2.2.27; 501) Aligning character with reputation implies a view of character with more emphasis on the spectator than on the agent; reputation is determined by others, rather than ourselves. To put it another way, this way of talking about character implies it is ‘out there’ rather than ‘in here’ – a social construct rather than a genuine property of a person. Hume’s use of character in this way is less obvious than his causal talk, but it is nonetheless talk he often uses. Even in ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’, both in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, which are full of causal language with regard to character, there is a reference to how others perceive us: “We may imagine we feel a liberty in ourselves; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character.” (T 2.3.2.2; 408-9 & EHU 8.22n; 94n) And in ‘The Sceptic’ he asks, “Desire this passionate lover to give you a character of his mistress...” (Essays 162) The process of ‘giving a character’ implies appeal to an observer, not the person characterised. This is the sense of ‘character’ that often seems most appropriate with regard to Hume’s characters in some of the *Essays* and the *History*.

The idea that character may be determined by spectators is pushed further when Hume is discussing virtue and vice. He talks of the virtue of justice, or the vice of injustice, as “fixing our character” more than any other quality (T 3.3.1.9; 577), but earlier he has remarked, “Vice and virtue... may be compar’d to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind.” (T 3.1.1.26; 469) The implication is that the main determinants of character, vice and virtue, are not genuine properties of the agent at

all. Instead, they are ‘perceptions in the mind’ of those who observe the agent’s actions.<sup>19</sup> One upshot of this way of understanding character is that one could, indeed probably would, have multiple characters, since different episodes of one’s life are observed by different groups of spectators. (The same is true for reputation.) This would, in turn, have significant implications for ethics, given the central place Hume accords to character. For this reason it is sometimes supposed that Hume gives an ideal observer theory: someone’s character is not determined by just any spectator, but only by an ideal spectator.

On the whole, the examples given so far are drawn from Hume’s discussions of the character of individuals, but he also attributes character to the sexes and people’s age, as already observed, as well as to professions, nations and eras. He refers to soldiers and priests as being “different characters, in all nations, and all ages,” (Essays 198) and goes on to draw some general observations on the two in terms of character traits. Soldiers are described as, “lavish and generous, as well as brave... candid, honest, and undesigning... [and] commonly thoughtless and ignorant.” The character of priests “is, in most points, opposite to that of a soldier.”<sup>20</sup> (Essays 199) That Hume ascribes characters to nations is clear from his essay ‘Of National Characters’, and in the essay ‘That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science’ he compares France under the government of Henry III and Henry IV. Speaking of Henry III he refers to “the character of the former miserable æra,” but when Henry IV acceded to the throne, “the government, the people, everything seemed to be totally changed.” (Essays 15)

That Hume attributes character to such things does not, of course, imply that he is using character in anything like the same sense as when he attributes it to individuals, but there is some evidence to suggest that he means something highly similar, if not in all important respects the same. He says of priests, for example,

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<sup>19</sup> There is no reason why agents cannot observe their own actions, thereby fixing their character themselves. But in this case the agent does not stand in any special relation to his character; the same person is both spectator and agent.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the quotation from ‘Of Superstition and Enthusiasm’ (p. 3), where the implication is that the character is distinct from the profession.

that “the character of the profession will not, in every instance, prevail over the personal character,” (Essays 199) and in terms of national character, “Where a number of men are united into one political body... [they] have a common or national character, as well as a personal one, peculiar to each individual.” (Essays 202-3) It seems, therefore, that when Hume talks of national character or the character of a profession he does not regard himself as talking about something radically different from personal character. The implication of these particular passages is that someone may have ‘two characters’, perhaps operating on a different level of generality – i.e. a priest may exhibit the general character of his profession but also have a personal character in addition. Alternatively, the ‘two characters’ may come into conflict, as the former quotation implies – i.e. a priest’s personal honesty may prevail against the dishonest character of his profession. As they stand, these observations are somewhat opaque; this opacity stands in need of clarification.

Finally, it is worth observing that character appears as both the property of a judge and the property which is judged in Hume’s philosophy, as both the object and the condition of judgement. That we judge of people’s characters when making moral evaluations is clear from Hume’s claim that “when we praise any actions, we regard [them]... as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper.” (T 3.2.1.2; 477) Our judgements concerning the truth of testimony are, unsurprisingly, linked to the veracity of the witness: “We may entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact, when the witnesses... [are] of a doubtful character.” (EHU 10.7; 112) But we also require a certain sort of character to make judgements about people’s character: “Nothing is so proper... as the cultivating of that higher and more refined taste, which enables us to judge of the characters of men.” (Essays 6) In a similar fashion, character is the key factor in having such a higher and more refined taste: “[A] true judge in the finer arts is observed... to be so rare a character.” (Essays 241) At least some kinds of judgement are then, for Hume, both judgements *of* character and judgements *by* character.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This is somewhat elliptical as it stands. It will receive considerable clarification in Chapters Three and Five.

Hume's use of 'character' thus includes causal talk, with character being both a cause and an effect, talk of character being similar to reputation, talk of character as a natural phenomenon, including the characters belonging to people of either sex or various ages, talk of character being a social phenomenon, applying to professions, nations and eras, and talk of character as both object and condition of judgement. Given the multiplicity of Hume's use of 'character' the question resurfaces as to whether he has *a* conception of character or whether it is just a collection of different concepts concealed by "the caprice of language," which thus, "ought not to be regarded in reasoning." (EPM 5.1n; 213n) As Selby-Bigge pointed-out in his introduction to the *Enquiries*,

Hume's philosophic writings are to be read with great caution... He applies the same principles to such a great variety of subjects that it is not surprising that many verbal, and some real inconsistencies can be found in his statements. He is ambitious rather than shy of saying the same thing in different ways, and at the same time he is often slovenly and indifferent about his words and formulae. This makes it easy to find all philosophies in Hume, or, by setting up one statement against another, none at all. (vii)

Given this observation about Hume's philosophy in general it is not to be expected that all of Hume's uses of character can be brought to complete consistency, but that is not to say that we will be unable to find *some* consistencies in Hume's account of character.

As an analogy to this, consider the word 'natural'. It is clear that Hume uses 'natural' in a variety of different ways, but rarely gives an explanation of what he means by it in any particular context.<sup>22</sup> Yet this careless use of a word is neither to be strongly censured, since it is hardly peculiar to Hume, nor taken as evidence that we cannot, by a close examination of the text, establish quite accurately what the

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<sup>22</sup> One notable exception comes in the section, 'Moral distinctions deriv'd from a moral sense', where Hume observes that the question as to whether we should seek the origin of morality in nature, "depends upon the definition of the word, *nature*, than which there is none more ambiguous and equivocal." He goes on to distinguish between the use of 'natural' as opposed to 'miraculous', as opposed to 'artificial' and as opposed to 'unusual' (T 3.1.2.7-10; 473-75).



word is being used to mean.<sup>23</sup> We may discover that there are one or two central uses of character in Hume's work, which can, once isolated, be clarified to a point where they yield interesting information for interpretation of his wider philosophy. That there is some ambiguity in Hume's usage does not imply that such ambiguity is irreducible, but that it requires some careful and methodical study of Hume's invocation of character in several different contexts to achieve a clear idea of what he intends. At the same time, it should not be supposed that all of Hume's uses of the word 'character' fit into the mould of one or two central uses; there are some uses of the word that clearly do not fit into such a mould.

## **Of Liberty and Necessity**

With such a wide range of uses of character in Hume's work, the question of where to begin is vexing. Whereas interpretative questions concerning many other topics have obvious core passages from which to begin and with which any interpretation must accord, there is not obviously such a core passage with respect to character. It may be supposed that since character is intimately related to the self it is best to start with a discussion of Hume's account of the self, which has a core central section in T 1.4.6 ('Of Personal Identity'). While this is certainly a reasonable approach to the question, it seems to me to subsume the question of character rather too much under the question of the self. In particular, there are some commentators who note Hume's distinction "betwixt personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves," (T 1.4.6.5; 253) who then go on to take the latter disjunct to be an oblique reference to character.<sup>24</sup> It would be disingenuous to pretend that Hume's comment here is merely hasty and ill-considered, as he repeats it later in the section (T 1.4.6.19; 261) and his discussion of the passions at times appears to refer back to the same

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the ambiguity of 'nature' and 'natural' both in the history of philosophy and more recently, see John Cottingham, "'Our Natural Guide...': Conscience, 'Nature', and Moral Experience," in *Human Values: New Essays on Ethics and Natural Law*, ed. David S. Oderberg and Timothy D. S. Chappell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Clarence Johnson, Susan Purviance and Jane McIntyre. All of whom have very different final analyses.

distinction (e.g. T 2.1.2.4; 278), but even if we acknowledge that the distinction is consistent and important to Hume's philosophy, it remains to be established that personal identity with regard to our passions is the same as character.

There are good reasons to see character as distinct from personal identity with regards to our passions. Hume refers to the latter disjunct as being a matter of 'the concern we take in ourselves.' This concern may be highly distinct from our character, such that we may desire to change our character. For example, Hume holds that "*no action can be virtuous... unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality.*" (T 3.2.1.7; 479) Consequently, "A person, who feels his heart devoid of that principle, may hate himself upon that account." (T 3.2.1.8; 479) Here the person is taking a specific concern in himself, and that is a matter of the passions (he hates himself<sup>25</sup>), but while the object of his concern is himself it is caused by a defect in his character. Hume is careful to distinguish between the cause of a passion and its object (T 2.1.2.2-3; 277-78). Character is therefore something different from personal identity as it regards our passions.<sup>26</sup> Further, the desirability of changing one's character in certain circumstances does not seem to carry through to questions of personal identity. Hume's sceptical attack on personal identity in T 1.4.6 is based upon a conception of the self as exhibiting "perfect identity and simplicity." (T 1.4.6.1; 251) It is precisely because there is no impression corresponding to these requirements that Hume concludes that the mind is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions... There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different." (T 1.4.6.4; 252-53) Self, however, is continually maintained to require perfect identity and simplicity, such that "we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects [perceptions] together, and prevents their interruption or variation." (T 1.4.6.6; 254) But Hume does not suppose character to have such properties. It is at least possible that the person's

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<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that Hume says that he 'hates himself' rather than that he feels 'humility' (shame).

<sup>26</sup> We might wish to say that the question of personal identity as it regards our passions is a question of survival. But questions of survival are not necessarily the same as questions of personal identity. See Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," in *Personal Identity*, ed. John Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

character may change, since he may “acquire by practice” (T 3.2.1.8; 479) that which is naturally wanting, but the (fictitious) self which is the object of the person’s concern does not change. Indeed, the one explicit reference to character in T 1.4.6 suggests both that Hume considers character and self to be different in exactly this way and that his personal identity with regard to our passions is distinct from character in that it implies an identity which resists changes of character:

And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. Whatever changes he endures, his several parts are still connected by the relation of causation. And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures. (T 1.4.6.19; 261)

None of this is intended to devalue studies which link the question of personal identity and the question of character. On the contrary, I agree that such questions are extremely important and valid and they will be discussed at various points during this study. My intention here is merely to cast some doubt upon Hume’s comments on personal identity as the most natural place to begin investigating his account of character. Were this a study of personal identity, which, as such studies should, considered Hume’s conception of character, then the starting point would be quite naturally T 1.4.6, but since this is a study of character, I propose, for the reasons given above, to begin elsewhere.

The most prolonged, as well as the most self-contained, discussions of character by Hume occur in the sections titled ‘Of Liberty and Necessity.’ While both the account given in T 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 and that given in EHU 8 fall short of giving anything like a complete account of Hume’s conception of character, both contain reasonably sustained discussions of character. Between them, they contain some reference to most of the different aspects of character of which Hume treats: both discuss character as the cause of action, both include reference to the way in which spectators are involved in character, and both discuss the moral implications of character. The discussion in the *Enquiry* also includes comments that link it to the

discussions in the *Essays* and *History*.

The similarities and differences between the two treatments Hume gives of liberty and necessity are interesting. This is not the place to give a detailed analysis, but a couple of comments are relevant. First, in many areas the discussions are virtually identical, such that it appears that Hume has copied his earlier work from the *Treatise* into the *First Enquiry*. This is significant in that it shows that Hume's views on this topic changed very little between 1739 and 1748, a period that covers the publication of many of his essays. It also shows that whatever view is taken on the similarities and differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* this is a point on which Hume's views have not significantly altered. If anything, in the *Enquiry* he is more assured of his position, when he asserts with both irony and arrogance that "all mankind...have always been of the same opinion with regard to this subject." (EHU 8.2; 81) Consequently, this is *prima facie* evidence for supposing that Hume's views on character, which form such a central part of his account of liberty and necessity, did not undergo a significant revision either. Second, the most significant difference between the two treatments consists in the placement of the discussion. In the *Treatise* Hume had decided to discuss the question of liberty and necessity in the context of the passions. It thus falls, slightly awkwardly, at the beginning of part three of Book Two. In the *Enquiries* the discussion has moved to the *First Enquiry*, which Hume explicitly associates with Book One of the *Treatise* in 'My Own Life' (Essays xxxv). This places it in the context of Hume's account of the powers of human understanding and specifically causation, rather than connecting it closer with his moral philosophy as might have been expected. Indeed, in the *First Enquiry* Hume's discussion of liberty and necessity falls immediately after his discussion of causation and induction. Whatever else this signifies, it emphasises the proximity of the question of character and that of causation in Hume's thought.

It is not appropriate here to get too involved in debates concerning the interpretation of Hume's theory of causation, but some statement of position is required. Hume is rarely considered to be such a radical sceptic about causation as he once was.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For example, by Thomas H. Green, "General Introduction" in David Hume, *A Treatise of Human*

Norman (Kemp) Smith published his two part, “The Naturalism of Hume,” in *Mind* in 1905, where he claims, “Belief in causal action is [according to Hume] natural and indispensable.”<sup>28</sup> He bolstered these views later in his book *The Philosophy of David Hume*. Kemp Smith’s analysis of Hume’s indispensable natural beliefs is certainly not universally and uncritically accepted, but even when criticised it is generally acknowledged by Hume commentators that reading him as a radical sceptic about causation is implausible.<sup>29</sup> On this point, I follow the lead of Annette Baier, who observes,

[I]f Hume really *distrusts* causal inference, and the inductions on which, if he is right, it rests, then he must distrust his own *Treatise*. The *Treatise*, from start to finish, traces what appear to be causal dependencies... [Hume relies] on causal inference before [Book One, Part III of] the *Treatise*; he relies on it during it; and he will rely on it after it... [T]he central argument of Book One, Part III is not any problem about induction, but rather the positive thesis that experience saves us, when deductive reason lets us down.<sup>30</sup>

As Baier emphasises, Hume certainly *trusts* our causal inferences, whether or not he regards them as natural and indispensable as Kemp Smith suggests.

The negative element of Hume’s discussion of causation consists in the denial that we can ever perceive or deduce a connection between two discrete objects.<sup>31</sup> All we perceive is that the objects are contiguous and successive. We never experience any causal power operating in the former, which necessitates the latter, “since, which-

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*Nature*, 2 vols., ed. Thomas H. Green and Thomas H. Grose (London, 1874), vol. 1:§ 296. I slightly overstate the case here. There are still those who take Hume to be a sceptic about causation, e.g. Peter Millican, “Hume’s Old and New: Four Fashionable Falsehoods, and One Unfashionable Truth,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 81 (2007), but as Millican’s title indicates such views are now uncommon amongst Hume scholars.

<sup>28</sup> Norman Smith, “The Naturalism of Hume(I),” *Mind* 14, no. 54 (1905): 152.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Norton, *David Hume*, 227-35.

<sup>30</sup> Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 55-56.

<sup>31</sup> Hume is more or less invariable in his reference to objects, although ‘events’ would (often) seem more appropriate. Provided we interpret ‘objects’ broadly enough, Hume’s terminology is unproblematic as far as we are concerned here.

ever of these qualities I pitch on, I find some object, that is not possest of it, and yet falls under the denomination of cause or effect.” (T 1.3.2.5; 75) As we are unable to perceive or deduce the idea of cause and effect from two discrete objects, one of which is cause and the other effect, we are unable to derive the idea from a single occurrence. The conclusion from this is that our idea of cause and effect must be based upon experience rather than reason (T 1.3.6.1-2; 86-87).

Hume claims that our idea of cause and effect has two elements: constant conjunction and “a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant.” (T 1.3.14.20; 165) The first of these two elements is a feature of the external world. Objects<sup>32</sup> really do occur in the world in regular pairs which exhibit certain similarities and it is these regularities in the world that are the subject matter of causal reasoning. However, although these regularities in the world are necessary for the idea of cause and effect, they are not sufficient, according to Hume. In addition to these actual regularities, we have a propensity of mind, specifically that after long experience of such regularities we come to expect the effect immediately upon being presented with the cause.<sup>33</sup> It is from this propensity that we come to the idea that the connection between cause and effect is a necessary connection.

Tho’ the several resembling instances, which give rise to the idea of power, have no influence on each other, and can never produce any new quality *in the object*... yet the *observation* of this resemblance produces a new idea *in the mind*, which is its real model. For after we have observ’d the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant... (T 1.3.14.20; 164-65)

Hume thus accounts for our belief in causation on the basis of real physical objects along with a natural propensity of our mind. This is hardly a sceptical account of causation. What Hume denies is that there is some special property of objects, “*efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality*,” all of which are “nearly synonymous,” (T 1.3.14.4; 157) that can be discovered by observation of the objects themselves or through deductive reasoning

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<sup>32</sup> Here the ‘objects’ terminology is strained.

<sup>33</sup> And vice-versa, although perhaps not with the same inexorability.

alone. Our belief in causation is not, then, based upon reason, but this is not to say that we have no such belief, nor to say that such a belief is unreliable. Hume is saying that belief in causation is non-rational in the sense of not being based upon reasoning, but he is not saying that it is irrational in the sense of inappropriate or excessive.

It is upon exactly these two conditions that Hume relies in his discussions of liberty and necessity. Hume argues that an account can be given of the relation between human characters and actions analogous to the account given of physical causation. Hume splits his argument into two sections. The first aims to show that the first condition of physical causation, that of constant conjunction, can be fulfilled by characters and actions. The second aims to show that the second condition of physical causation, that of a natural propensity of the mind to move from the cause to the effect, also applies in the case of characters and actions.

In order to establish his first premise, that characters and actions are constantly conjoined, Hume appeals to patterns of behaviour.

Whether we consider mankind according to the difference of sexes, ages, governments, conditions, or methods of education; the same uniformity and regular operation of natural principles are discernable. Like causes still produce like effects; in the same manner as in the mutual action of the elements and powers of nature. (T 2.3.1.5; 401)

There is a general course of nature in human actions, as well as in the operations of the sun and the climate. There are also characters peculiar to different nations and particular persons, as well as common to mankind. The knowledge of these characters is founded on the observation of an uniformity in the actions, that flow from them; and this uniformity forms the very essence of necessity. (T 2.3.1.10; 402-403)

This kind of uniformity is clearly something that we are able to observe. People do behave in quite regular ways and this is applied in various different contexts, from psychological and sociological theories to practical methods of marketing and crowd control. Prediction is still problematic and people's reactions to similar situations diverge, but this difficulty has a ready explanation in that there are so

many influences involved that some degree of divergence is likely. And this is exactly the defence Hume uses against an accusation that human nature is not so constant as he supposes: “[T]he usual contrariety proceeds from the operation of contrary and conceal’d causes, [consequently] we conclude, that the chance or indifference lies only in our judgement on account of our imperfect knowledge.” (T 2.3.1.12; 403-4) This is perfectly in accord with his account of physical causation: “From the observation of several parallel instances, philosophers form a maxim, that the connexion betwixt all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes.” (T 1.3.12.5; 132)

Despite the commonsensical nature of Hume’s comments and their accord with his remarks on physical causation they remain somewhat unsatisfactory. Specifically, whereas in the case of physical causation there are numerous instances in which the causes are not secret at all, such as in the case of the billiard balls, in the case of characters and actions it is not apparent that the causes are ever so obvious. Hume refers to the ‘regular operation of natural principles,’ but he does not indicate what those natural principles themselves are supposed to be.

The second part of Hume’s argument in ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’ fares little better. His aim is to show that, in a similar fashion to how we make inferences from causes to effects in the case of physical causation, we make inference from characters to actions. Again, for the most part, his argument relies on some fairly commonsensical observations:

[N]o philosopher... [refuses] to acknowledge the force of *moral evidence*, [which]... is nothing but a conclusion concerning the actions of men, deriv’d from the consideration of their motives, temper and situation. (T 2.3.1.15; 404)

[People] firmly believe that all men, as well as all the elements, are to continue, in their operations, the same that they have ever found them. A manufacturer reckons upon the labour of his servants, for the execution of any work, as much as upon the tools, which he employs, and would be equally surprised, were his expectations disappointed. (EHU 8.17; 89)

And again he appeals to the operation of secret causes when such expectations are



disappointed:

We may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition. (T 2.3.2.2; 408-9 & EHU 8.22n; 94n)

So again Hume has given us some plausible observations, but again he has failed to specify what the character from which we infer the actions might be. If we see one billiard ball moving towards a second we are naturally led to expect the latter to begin to move upon contact, but from what is it that we make the inference to actions? Appeal to secret causes becomes hollow if secret causes are the only kinds of causes to which we can appeal.

It may be suggested that Hume's reference to patterns of actions shows that he intends character to simply be a pattern of actions. While some of the comments that he makes in 'Of Liberty and Necessity' tend towards such an interpretation, towards the end of his discussion he clearly repudiates such a view. Unless there is something that endures after the "temporary and perishing" action is performed, "'tis impossible... that punishments cou'd be inflicted compatible with justice or moral equity," nor could it "even enter into the thoughts of any reasonable being to inflict them." (T 2.3.2.6; 411) Whether or not Hume is correct on this point, it is clear that he considers characters to be something different from actions, which are merely to be considered as "indications of the internal character, passions, and affections." (EHU 8.31; 99)<sup>34</sup>

There is another argument to be found in the *Enquiry* version of the discussion, which is quite different from Hume's declared aim to show that human action fits the same model as physical causation. It relies upon an appeal to Hume's social sciences:

What would become of *history*, had we not a dependency on the veracity of the

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<sup>34</sup> More needs to be said on the question of character as a construct from actions. This discussion is postponed to Chapter Three.

historian, according to the experience, which we have had of mankind? How could *politics* be a science, if the laws and forms of government had not a uniform influence upon society? Where would be the foundation of *morals*, if particular characters had no certain or determinate power to produce particular sentiments, and if these sentiments had no constant operation on actions? And with what pretence could we employ our *criticism* upon any poet or polite author, if we could not pronounce the conduct and sentiments of his actors, either natural or unnatural, to such characters, and in such circumstances? It seems almost impossible, therefore, to engage, either in science or action of any kind, without acknowledging the doctrine of necessity, and this *inference* from motives to voluntary actions; from characters to conduct. (EHU 8.18; 90)

Hume's rendering of this argument is reminiscent of his *Advertisement* to the first two books of the *Treatise*, where he anticipates the complete work as containing not just the discussions of the understanding and passions, which are contained therein, but as proceeding "to the examination of *Morals, Politics and Criticism*." (T p. 2; xii) The overall implication is therefore twofold. First, Hume is making what could be described as a proto-Kantian transcendental argument. We have a set of sciences, history, politics, morals, and criticism, all of which, Hume argues, are fruitful. It is a condition of their being fruitful that there is a causal connection between characters and actions.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, there is a causal connection between characters and actions.<sup>36</sup> Second, when the passage from the *Enquiry* and the *Advertisement* are taken together, Hume can be seen to be appealing to the unity of the sciences. The single principle that characters are causally related to actions can be applied across numerous different fields of enquiry, showing it to have great explanatory and unifying power. It is intimately connected to one of the most fundamental commitments of Hume's philosophy: the uniformity of human nature. As he puts it in the Introduction to the *Treatise*, "[A]ll the sciences have a relation, greater or

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<sup>35</sup> That is to say, that there is a constant conjunction between characters and actions, along with an inference of the mind.

<sup>36</sup> An alternative interpretation might run: it is a given that we are able to form social sciences; in order to form social sciences we must perceive the social world as containing characters which cause actions; therefore it is a fact of our perceptual constitution that we perceive characters. This is something like the "Fact of Agency Theory" defended by Susan Purviance. See Purviance, "The Moral Self," 196.

less, to human nature... Even *Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN.” (T Intr.4; xv)

Despite its brevity this argument is of significant import for the interpretation of Hume’s comments on character. It gives explicit support for the claims I made above suggesting that character is of central importance to Hume’s philosophy. But like the other arguments in ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’ it establishes the importance of character without being anything more than suggestive as to what character is.

### **Three Conditions**

Having examined how Hume’s argument in ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’ bears on the topic it is possible to lay out a few conditions which any interpretation of Hume’s conception of character must fulfil in order to be plausible. I will give three such conditions. The first is a metaphysical condition, the second epistemological and the third practical.

#### ***The Metaphysical Condition***

Throughout ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’ Hume treats character as being the cause of actions. While he does not give much explicit guidance as to what he takes character to be in those sections, the mere fact that he is treating it as a cause has implications. In the case of physical causation we experience a constant conjunction between two objects. Whatever the status of the causation itself, insofar as we are concerned with the question of causation, both objects are considered to be real.<sup>37</sup> This implication is strongly carried over in Hume’s discussion of character as the cause of actions. That is to say, Hume treatment of character as the cause of actions implies that he considers character to be a real feature of persons.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> When Hume characterises superstition he says, “where real objects of terror are wanting, the soul... finds imaginary ones.” (Essays 73-74) The superstitious are given to imagine non-existent causes of terrors, implying that the proper causes of terrors are real. See the discussion of superstition and enthusiasm in Chapter Two, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> Here I am in agreement with McIntyre, who repeatedly asserts “Hume’s realism about character.”

This does not entail that character must be some kind of substance, whether physical or mental, since Hume repudiates the notion of substance altogether. In T 1.4.3 he argues that our idea of (physical) substance arises because of the contradiction between our ascription of identity to an object when perceived through successive changes and our ascription of diversity to it when we perceive only each end of the sequence. “In order to reconcile which contradictions the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance*.” (T 1.4.3.4; 220) A similar argument is employed in T 1.4.6, as already discussed, to reject the notion of mental substance. What links successive perceptions together to form objects is, according to Hume, merely their close association in accordance with resemblance, contiguity and causation. Many of Hume’s comments along these lines imply that he considers nothing whatsoever to be real, such as when he says, “The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies.” (T 1.4.6.15; 259) This conclusion would be hasty. What is fictitious here is the *identity* ascribed to objects and since Hume sets the bar for identity so high that practically nothing reaches it that is hardly surprising. It does not follow that the object is not considered by Hume to be real. His comments on the way various qualities are held together by “some *common end* or purpose,” which becomes “still more remarkable, when we add a *sympathy*<sup>39</sup> of parts to their *common end*,” are in no way sceptical. To illustrate these observations he declares, “An oak, that grows from a small plant to a large tree, is still the same oak; tho’ there be not one particle of matter, or figure of its parts the same.” (T 1.4.6.11-12; 257) This does not unequivocally establish that Hume considers the oak to be *real*, but rather indicates that Hume is unconcerned about such issues. In T 1.4.2 he remarks that scepticism with regard to the external world, as well as to the internal,

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See McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” 195 and 203.

<sup>39</sup> This use of ‘sympathy’ is peculiar. It is not meant in the same sense as Hume later uses it in his discussion of the passions and morals. What it seems to mark is the difference between the organisation towards a common end in a manufactured object and such organisation in an organism. In the latter case it can be said that each part has an interest in the common end, i.e. survival, whereas a manufactured object cannot meaningfully be said to have interests at all.

is impossible to refute, and so “Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.” (T 1.4.2.57; 218) This is not, as Annette Baier observes, an invitation to negligence but a recommendation to treat such questions in a “carefree and liberated” fashion.<sup>40</sup> And such lack of concern seems warranted. If Hume’s repudiation of substance were to indicate that nothing is real it is all the same to say that everything is real, so the return of the word to its ordinary (vulgar) usage with relation to objects such as oak trees is a step in the right direction.

Hume shows a similar lack of concern with respect to the use of ‘real’ that would set it in opposition to ‘ideal’ or ‘mind-dependent’. In T 1.4.4 he discusses the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, arguing, following Berkeley, that if we accept the argument against the latter it can be applied equally to the former. Again, this would render nothing, or everything, real. Discussing the same distinction in ‘The Sceptic’ he declares, “This doctrine, however, takes off no more from the *reality* of the latter qualities, than from that of the former... Though colours were allowed to lie only in the eye, would dyers or painters ever be less regarded or esteemed?” (Essays 166n, emphasis mine)

Saying that character must be something real for Hume clearly leaves a lot of latitude. But what does it exclude? McIntyre puts the point perfectly when she says that character, “is not *merely* the projection of the spectator’s felt connection between the person and a type of action.”<sup>41</sup> Another way to look at it is to return to the conditions of an object in physical causation for Hume. In these circumstances the cause must be contiguous and antecedent to the effect. Character must, then, be contiguous to the action, i.e. it must be a property of the person performing the action, and it must be antecedent to the action. As a corollary to the latter, character must be independent of the action itself, since it must have existed prior to the action’s being performed.

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<sup>40</sup> Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 1-2. Cf. Kemp Smith, “Hume undoubtedly accepts Berkeley’s arguments against the *knowability* of [a material] world... [but] he denies its relevancy.” *The Philosophy of David Hume*, 85.

<sup>41</sup> McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” 203.

## ***The Epistemological Condition***

The second condition that any account of Hume on character must fulfil is epistemological. In order for us to experience a constant conjunction of characters and actions we must know that certain people have certain characters. Explanation of how we come to know about characters is, as already discussed, somewhat lacking in ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’, but it is nonetheless the case that Hume thinks that we can have knowledge of people’s characters.

The specifics of the condition stem from Hume’s restriction of the sources from which we can come to have knowledge. Specifically, we are restricted to things which can be observed or experienced, in accord with his empiricism. At its most basic level, this comes down to the relation between impressions and ideas, i.e. Hume’s requirement that for any idea that we have we must be able to find the impression(s) from which it arose. In the case at hand, this means that we must be able to find some impression, or set of impressions, from which our idea of character arises. While at first this condition is used very stringently by Hume, later in the *Treatise* it appears in various ways to be relaxed, but never abandoned. Later in the *Treatise* Hume elaborates on the depth and kinds of impressions that we may receive, particularly through his account of the passions and the mechanism of sympathy, showing that there are actually multiple sources of our knowledge, even though his arguments in Book One seem to regard sensory impressions as the only relevant sources of knowledge.<sup>42</sup> We are, however, entitled to rule out any argument that suggests character is discovered in ways that ignore the requirement for a prior (set of) impression(s). For example, character is clearly regarded by Hume to be an empirical fact about persons. It is, therefore, not discoverable through the relation of ideas, so we can reasonably conclude that it is not something we can come to know through demonstration. Instead we must rely on empirical proofs about character.

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<sup>42</sup> This is to such a marked extent that Norton claims Hume to have two separate approaches, to the extent that there can be seen to be a sceptical metaphysician Hume and a common-sense moral Hume. While Norton’s work on this subject is admirable and well-argued, I think that splitting Hume in two in this way should be avoided if at all possible, and further that it is avoidable.

It is important that the epistemological condition is not made too strong; it must be made in terms of the knowable rather than the known. Hume repeatedly emphasises that there are a vast number of concealed and secret causes in play, both in natural causation and in moral causation. Concealed and secret causes have already been discussed above, but in the *Enquiry* Hume extends his discussion:

[W]hen the usual symptoms of health or sickness disappoint our expectation; when medicines operate not with their wonted powers; when irregular events follow from any particular cause; the philosopher and physician are not surprised at the matter... They know, that the human body is a mighty complicated machine: That many secret powers lurk in it, which are *altogether beyond our comprehension*... The internal principles and motives may operate in a uniform manner, notwithstanding these seeming irregularities; in the same manner as the winds, rain, clouds, and other variations of the weather are supposed to be governed by steady principles; though *not easily discoverable* by human sagacity and enquiry. (EHU 8.14-15; 87-88, my emphases)

Hume equivocates here between ‘altogether beyond our comprehension’ and ‘not easily discoverable,’ but there are good reasons to prefer the latter. The lack of surprise exhibited by the philosopher and physician echoes a contrast Hume makes in the previous paragraph between a peasant, who “can give no better reason for the stopping of any clock or watch than to say that it does not commonly go right,” and “an artist,” who observes “a grain of dust, which puts a stop to the whole movement.” (EHU 8.13; 87)<sup>43</sup> The workings of the watch are *altogether beyond the comprehension* of the peasant, but that does not mean that they must ultimately escape the *sagacity and enquiry* of the artist. The implication is that the secret, or better here concealed, causes are ultimately discoverable by human enquiry.

The epistemological condition does not require that characters are only constituted by things which are known. It rather requires that characters are constituted by things that are, at least in principle, knowable. At times we may postulate a ‘something’ that explains the current actions, without knowing what it actually is,

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<sup>43</sup> This same example appears in the *Treatise*, but in the context of Hume’s discussion ‘Of the Probability of Causes’ (T 1.3.12.5; 132).

but such postulation must be understood to introduce a mere placeholder,<sup>44</sup> which stands in need of further investigation in order to fill it in.<sup>45</sup> What we must resist is elevating this ‘something’ to a state of real existence in its own right, which is to make it an “occult quality.” (T 1.4.3.10; 224) The difference being that occult qualities are introduced as a supposed end of enquiry, whereas the unknown ‘something’ here is introduced as the (potential) object of investigation. The artist may say of the stopped watch, “There is *something* interfering with the mechanism,” before he has had the opportunity to remove the back panel and discover that that ‘something’ is, in actual fact, a grain of dust. He may not say of the stopped watch, “There is *something* that is stopping it working,” and then proceed with no further investigation to say, “A witch must have put a *hex* on it.” ‘Hex’ here is just a substitute for ‘something’ and explains nothing further.<sup>46</sup>

### ***The Practical Condition***

The epistemological condition leaves things rather incomplete. While it is important to note that character must be knowable in principle, it is equally important to keep in mind why character is being introduced in the first place. Character is to play an important practical role. Most central to this is the moral function of character in Hume’s philosophy, but it is important to bear in mind that Hume indicates that character has a vital practical function in the other social sciences of history, politics and criticism.<sup>47</sup> The upshot of this is that the means by which we discover character

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<sup>44</sup> John Bricke’s account of dispositional qualities relies on exactly this notion and I am indebted to his discussion here. His own account will be considered in detail towards the end of the chapter, see p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> Whether such investigation is actually to be carried out in a particular case depends on the purpose for which the ‘something’ has been introduced. For example, if we can confidently attribute a vicious character to someone in a court of law it is not necessary that we should investigate the exact constitution of that character in order to pass judgement.

<sup>46</sup> Again, the link to superstition is apparent: when we do not know we are not entitled to fabricate some imaginary entity to fulfil the metaphysical condition. See p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> This will prove particularly important at certain points in Chapter Two, when the elements of character will be considered. It is common for commentators to restrict Hume’s use of character to morality, thereby neglecting its importance in other fields of enquiry. It will become apparent as I



must be continuous with ordinary methods of enquiry.

The practical function of character, particularly in the case of morality, lends an urgency to the question of how we come to have knowledge of it that is lacking in the case of the epistemological condition. If we are to place character so centrally in morality it becomes dangerously insufficient to describe it as knowable rather than actually known. As Hume says, “Where would be the foundation of *morals*, if particular characters had no certain or determinate power to produce particular sentiments, and if these sentiments had no constant operation on actions?” But the foundation of morals would be equally corroded if we didn’t have knowledge, however imperfect, of the characters involved. Equally, if we are unable to know people’s characters, “It seems almost impossible” for us to engage in “action of any kind.” (EHU 8.18; 90) When we act we rely as much upon the reactions of others as we do upon the physical world.

The urgency becomes more acute when we note that morality is something that concerns the peasant as much as the artist. The peasant’s lack of knowledge concerning clocks prevents his becoming a watchmaker. The narrowing of career choice may be bad for the peasant – it leaves him little opportunity to improve his lot – but if he lacks any knowledge of character and knowledge of character is essential for morality that is not bad merely for the peasant but for all of us. The practical condition then stipulates that character must not be altogether beyond the comprehension of the peasant; from a practical point of view, knowledge of character must be easily accessible to a broad range of people.

This is not to say that character must be glaringly obvious to all. The discussion of secret causes shows that this need not be the case. Nonetheless, in order for character to play the practical role in Hume’s philosophy that it does, it must be the case that some knowledge of character is readily available to the majority of mankind. This does not preclude good knowledge of character being very difficult to attain, but it does preclude knowledge of character being the preserve of a select

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proceed that such a restriction distorts Hume’s view of character, causing us to exclude various important elements. See below, p. 58.

few.<sup>48</sup> The lack of surprise exhibited by the philosopher and physician is invoked in the context of disappointed expectation and irregular events. It can therefore be suggested that it is only under exceptional circumstances that the select few are required. This would be to take the matter a little too far, but the case highlights that in normal, everyday circumstances specialist knowledge is not required. And even ordinary experience may be sufficient, as suggested by Hume's analogy of an "aged husbandman" being "more skilful in his calling than the young beginner." It is "experience [that] teaches the old practitioner the rules," not the esoteric study of philosophy or anatomy (EHU 8.9; 85).

It is thus necessary to mediate between the epistemological and practical conditions. A key motivation for the epistemological condition being restricted to 'knowable' rather than 'actually known' was the, surely correct, observation that we often do not know the character of a person perfectly, and even when we do know someone's character quite well it may be that we do not know the secret causes on which it is based. However, when the practical aspects of character are brought into view, it becomes clear that the promise that character may be discoverable through diligent enquiry proves insufficient. This requirement is based on equally strong observations, since the practical aspects of character are the primary motivation for its initial introduction. Taking the epistemological requirements to trump the practical considerations would be equivalent to abandoning character as a concept altogether, but that we are often unaware of the secret causes of behaviour is undeniable. The two conditions are, then, equally important, but they are in tension with one another.

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<sup>48</sup> It would be possible to read Hume as restricting proper knowledge of character to an upper class of educated men. I do not dispute that there are some elements of Hume's philosophy that could imply such a reading, but even if that is what Hume himself believed, his conception of character can be saved from such views, as will be shown. Even the concession that some knowledge of character that is difficult to attain may be taken by some to be too elitist for any reasonable morality. On the other hand, I suggest that Hume's account highlights the importance of education for any kind of moral society, since knowledge of the secret causes of human behaviour, whether attained through scientific, social scientific, or liberal means enhances the moral possibilities of the agent. Hume's idea of the moral judge or critic, discussed in Chapter Five, is suggestive of a degree of elitism in his philosophy.

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These sketches of the three conditions, which, I maintain, any interpretation of Hume on character must fulfil, are, at present, somewhat crude, but they should suffice to give a working framework for enquiry. As this study proceeds the sketches will be refined and in some ways revised. It is worth noting at this early stage that the three conditions certainly do not amount to the only requirements on an interpretation of Hume on character. For example, I have not included durability amongst these three conditions, although it is both a feature of character on which Hume insists and is presupposed in each of the three conditions given above. The reason for the exclusion of conditions such as durability is twofold. First, there is very little to say about durability in isolation of any larger topic except that Hume describes characters as durable (e.g. T 2.3.2.6; 411 & T 3.3.1.4; 575).<sup>49</sup> Second, no one disputes, or fails to recognise, that durability is a requisite feature of character. Hume has been criticised for his reliance on a durable character on the grounds that his own account of personal identity precludes such a thing, but such a criticism relies implicitly on the idea that Hume is unequivocal in requiring character to be durable.<sup>50</sup> The three conditions are not intended to be exclusive of other conditions and even taking the three together there is a lot of latitude. There are some approaches to Hume on character that will fulfil all three conditions, but will prove to be unsatisfactory, or incomplete, for other reasons. Some of these approaches will be considered in Chapters Two and Three. Nor do the three conditions on their own always constitute a knockdown argument against an interpretation that fails to fulfil one of them. Timothy Costelloe explicitly rejects the metaphysical condition, although he does not call it such. It will thus be necessary in Chapter Three to consider Costelloe's exact reasons for rejecting the metaphysical condition. I will there argue that his reasons are misguided and that the metaphysical condition should be retained, but this will involve some specific engagement with Costelloe's

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<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of issues surrounding the durability of character, not exclusively in Hume, see Joel Kupperman, "Character and Self-Knowledge," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 85 (1985): 223-25.

<sup>50</sup> See Philippa Foot, "Free Will as Involving Determinism," *Philosophical Review* 66, no. 4 (1957): 448-49.

arguments. Barring arguments for the specific exclusion of one of the conditions, however, any view that fails to fulfil them can be held to be unsatisfactory insofar as it fails.

## **The Three Conditions in Practice: Bricke's Dispositional Analysis of Character**

To build on the sketch of the three conditions given above it is worth considering how the conditions work in practice. John Bricke argues that Hume's remarks in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* clearly establish that he considers character traits to be "relatively permanent mental properties." Further, these qualities "are clearly, for Hume, dispositional properties. For the relatively long period of time during which a person has a given trait of character it is true of him that were certain conditions to obtain, he would respond in certain ways."<sup>51</sup>

According to Bricke, Hume has two separate theories of dispositional properties, one reductionist and another non-reductionist. However, since Bricke further argues that Hume's "reasons for being a reductionist were not compelling ones,"<sup>52</sup> and that it is also the case that Bricke holds that Hume's discussion of character exclusively supports the non-reductionist theory, the reductionist account will not be discussed in any detail here. Bricke characterises the reductionist and non-reductionist positions in terms of the following three statements:

- (1)  $D_a$
- (2)  $O_a \rightarrow R_a$
- (3)  $(\exists \phi) [\phi_a \& (\forall \chi) ([\phi_\chi \& O_\chi] \rightarrow R_\chi)]$

(1) represents an apparently categorical dispositional statement, such as 'Smith can swim.' (2) represents an overtly hypothetical statement to the effect that if certain conditions  $O$  are satisfied,  $a$  will (or it is likely that  $a$  will, or it is possible that  $a$  will) respond in a certain way  $R$ ... [In (3),]  $\phi$  stands for an unspecified non-

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<sup>51</sup> Bricke, "Hume's Conception of Character," 249.

<sup>52</sup> John Bricke, "Hume's Theories of Dispositional Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1973): 15.

dispositional property which is attributed to  $a$ , and which is also mentioned in the law of nature which begins with the universal quantifier.<sup>53</sup>

Bricke holds that a reductionist thinks that (1) can be reduced, without loss, to (2), while a non-reductionist holds that if (1) is true, (3) is also true. According to Bricke's analysis, Hume's discussion of character implies that saying that someone has a character trait – equivalent to asserting (1) – commits one to endorsing (3). On this analysis  $\varphi$  is the property corresponding to the character trait.

The property  $\varphi$  is, thus far, unspecified by Bricke, but it is apparent that he considers it to be a real property. Moreover, it is a property of the agent. Attributing a reductionist view to Hume on the subject of character would commit Hume to statement (2) as an exhaustive analysis of (1). That is to say, it would attribute to Hume the view that a statement about a character trait  $D$  could be exhaustively analysed as, if circumstances  $O$  obtain then  $a$  will  $R$ . This reduces  $D$  to a pattern of actions on the part of  $a$ ; it makes no reference to any property of  $a$  at all. It would therefore fail the metaphysical condition. But on Bricke's account, Hume's view is that asserting the dispositional statement (1) merely commits one to also asserting the non-dispositional statement (3). This does not reduce  $D$  to a pattern of actions on the part of  $a$ , since there is space for an explanation of  $a$ 's actions in terms of property  $\varphi$ . As  $\varphi$  is considered by Bricke to be a real property of agent  $a$ , his interpretation fulfils the metaphysical condition.<sup>54</sup>

It is not yet clear whether Bricke's formula fulfils the epistemological condition. Whether or not it does depends upon the status of  $\varphi$ . The introduction of  $\varphi$  is somewhat problematic, since it is implicit in the very statement that  $\varphi$  is unknown. This calls to mind Hume's discussion of the ancient philosophers, who invent "the words *faculty* and *occult quality*," which are then fancied "to have a secret meaning, which we might discover by reflection." They are then able to deploy these terms to

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<sup>53</sup> Bricke, "Dispositional Properties," 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> Note that this does not commit Bricke, or Bricke's Hume, to any particular theory about dispositions in general. It remains an open question as to whether there are some dispositional properties that can be reduced to (2). But such dispositional properties are not to be identified as character traits. Cf. Bricke, "Dispositional Properties," 18.

explain “any phænomenon, which puzzles them.” (T 1.4.3.10; 224) But such an explanation is obviously vacuous. The invention of some new words does nothing to explain the puzzling phenomenon, it simply lulls us into the false belief that we have explained it. Bricke considers an objection to (3) on these very lines:

In rejecting this ‘secret meaning’ analysis, Hume seems committed to saying that the meaning of dispositional terms can be explicated without reference to unobservable properties. There is no place, then, for  $\varphi$  in formula (3), since it is construed as designating an enduring, *but not necessarily observable*, non-dispositional property.<sup>55</sup>

He responds to this prolepsis by arguing that the property  $\varphi$  is not unobservable in principle, it is actually an “empirical, but not *normally* observable” property.<sup>56</sup> He goes on to analyse formula (3) and the role of  $\varphi$  in it in a way that gives a clear indication that his interpretation fulfils both the metaphysical and the epistemological conditions:

To say that some entity must have a property, at present unknown, because its behaviour would otherwise be inexplicable, is not to offer a vacuous explanation of its behaviour, for it is not to offer any explanation at all. To say that something is explainable, because it is caused, is not to *give* an explanation, but rather to *mark a place* for that factor which, were it known, would provide the explanation. In formula (3),  $\varphi$  functions as such a place-marker. Its presence indicates that a full explanation is not now available, though it is in principle available, and, given the interpretation provided when it was introduced, it suggests something about the character which the unknown property must have. In particular, it suggests that the property must be an enduring property of the entity itself, rather than a property of its environment.<sup>57</sup>

This statement of his position shows that Bricke’s interpretation fulfils both the metaphysical and epistemological conditions very well. But it seems less satisfactory when subjected to the practical condition. The idea that  $\varphi$  is ‘at present unknown’ and that Bricke’s formula does not ‘offer any explanation at all’ will not

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<sup>55</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 18, emphasis mine.

<sup>56</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 20.

<sup>57</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 21.

suffice when faced with the urgency of the practical condition.

But why is Bricke so insistent that  $\phi$  is ‘at present unknown’? Earlier in the paper he uses the analogy of the “solubility of sugar.” He distinguishes between the “macro-properties such as color, smell, and taste,” and its “micro-properties.” We are, he argues, “disinclined to admit” that the macro-properties are “sufficient... to explain an object’s dissolving.” This is because “a presumptive law stated only in terms of macro-properties does not have a place in any reasonably extensive system of empirical laws.”<sup>58</sup> Bricke is surely correct on this point; science would be unworkable on the basis of macro-properties (alone). He also mounts a convincing case that Hume conceived of the sciences in similar terms. He cites EHU 1.15; 14-15 where Hume writes, “It is probable, that one operation and principle of the mind depends on another, which, again, may be resolved into one more general and universal.” And also T 2.1.4.6-7; 282,

[W]e find in the course of nature, that tho’ the effects be many, the principles, from which they arise, are commonly but few and simple, and that ’tis the sign of an unskilful naturalist to have recourse to a different quality, in order to explain every different operation... To invent without scruple a new principle to every new phaenomenon, instead of adapting it to the old; to overload our hypotheses with a variety of this kind; are certain proofs, that none of these principles is the just one, and that we only, desire, by a number of falshoods, to cover our ignorance of the truth.

In both cases Hume appears to be endorsing a systematic approach to science, whereby there is a hierarchy of laws that ultimately explain phenomena in terms of micro-properties. A skilful naturalist will attempt to reduce the principles or laws to the minimum number possible to explain the range of phenomena.

These passages are not unequivocal and Bricke is guilty of overemphasising them. While it is undoubtedly the case that Hume subscribes to some kind of unity of the sciences, his views are generally more pluralistic than these statements imply. He is equally aware that the attempt to account for everything through only one method of enquiry, or only one principle, can be distorting. In EHU 1, for example, he

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<sup>58</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 20.

refers to man as a “reasonable being,” a “sociable” being, and an “active being.” Going on to suggest that “nature has pointed out a mixed kind of life as most suitable to the human race... Indulge your passion for science... but let your science be human, and such as may have a direct reference to action and society.” (EHU 1.6; 8-9) Shortly thereafter he distinguishes between the anatomist, who “presents to the eye the most hideous and disagreeable objects,” and the painter, who uses the anatomist’s scientific discoveries in his “delineating even a VENUS or an HELEN.” (EHU 1.8; 10) Here there is an exchange and to some degree a commonality of purpose, but there is no reduction of principles to more fundamental levels. And just after saying that the mind may be reduced to ‘more general and universal’ principles<sup>59</sup> he criticises some moralists for having “sometimes carried the matter too far, by their passion for some one general principle.” (EHU 1.15; 15)

When it comes to giving any positive account of how we might cash out  $\varphi$  Bricke ignores Hume’s equivocation on this point; Bricke’s Hume is unequivocally scientific in his aims. Consequently, when it comes to accounting for  $\varphi$  he pitches upon a physiological explanation: “I suspect, though I cannot prove, that a physiological account could be given of those seemingly mysterious, unknown properties.”<sup>60</sup> This physiological account is presumably to be given in terms of the micro-properties of the person involved, and elsewhere Bricke refers to the “long-term causal conditions” that his account of character traits assumes as “states of the brain.”<sup>61</sup> According to Bricke,  $\varphi$  is revealed through science, particularly neuroscience.

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<sup>59</sup> It’s worth noting that the comparative ‘more’ suggests that Hume does not see the mind as ever being resolved into any principles that are absolutely universal.

<sup>60</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 22.

<sup>61</sup> Bricke, “Hume’s Conception of Character,” 250. He actually refers to them as “psychological” states of the brain, which confuses the issue slightly. However, as he goes on to note “Hume’s assertions that the laws of the association of ideas have a physiological basis, (T [1.2.5.20;] 60-61) and that both thought (T [1.4.5.30;] 248) and sensation (T [2.1.1.1;] 275, [2.1.5.6;] 287) have physical causes,” (ibid.) it is reasonable to read Bricke as meaning ‘physiological’.



Bricke's interpretation of Hume on character fails the practical condition. By making dispositional traits of character dependent upon a presently unknown non-dispositional property  $\varphi$  and cashing out  $\varphi$  exclusively in scientific terms, Bricke puts knowledge of character beyond the reach of all but a select few. Indeed, if we take his reference to 'states of the brain' literally, Bricke puts knowledge of character beyond the reach of Hume himself, notwithstanding that Hume himself makes occasional allusions to brain states. But it is already clear that Hume thinks that knowledge of character is, at least in part, accessible to a broader range of people than just scientists. In particular, Hume thinks that character can be revealed through history and politics. For this to work, the causes of actions designated by  $\varphi$  cannot all be secret.

The formula for mental dispositions developed by Bricke is nonetheless promising, as there is nothing in the formula itself to exclude  $\varphi$  being cashed out in different terms to those that Bricke himself endorses. With this in mind, I take Bricke's formula as a working model. The next step is to examine the range of possible properties which could cash out  $\varphi$ .

## Chapter Two

### Elements of Character

In the previous chapter, it was argued that three conditions for any account of Hume's conception of character can be derived from the argument given in 'Of Liberty and Necessity', along with some reference to other parts of his philosophy. Although those three conditions restrict interpretations of Hume on character to some extent, they are far from establishing Hume's conception of character on their own. The examination of Bricke's account at the end of the chapter showed his account to be promising in its structure, but flawed in that it fails to fulfil the practical condition. The chief problem with Bricke's analysis is that he ultimately cashes out  $\varphi$  in a way that makes it inaccessible to a majority of people. Indeed, the ways in which  $\varphi$  may be discovered according to Bricke are in no way continuous with the ways in which ordinary people may learn about character. In this chapter, I will consider various alternative ways of cashing out  $\varphi$ , ways which make  $\varphi$  more ordinarily accessible. The starting point will be the account developed by Jane McIntyre, who holds that character can be identified with a suitably restricted set of passions. McIntyre's view is structurally congruent with Bricke's, such that she can be understood to identify  $\varphi$  with the Humean passions. I will argue against McIntyre that there is no one way of cashing out  $\varphi$  that does justice to all of Hume's comments on character; McIntyre's restriction of  $\varphi$  to the passions is too narrow. In light of this, Bricke's formula needs to be modified, namely  $\varphi$  needs to be understood to be a complex of several different elements of different kinds. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the heterogeneous elements involved in character can be understood to be analogous to the bundle-theory of the self Hume offers in T 1.4.6.

The different elements identified in this chapter will be examined in light of the three conditions laid out in Chapter One. Of particular importance here is the metaphysical condition: all of the elements must *individually* be regarded as real components of character. In contrast, some, but by no means all, of the elements

prove difficult for the other two conditions. In Chapter Three the discussion will first answer a challenge to the metaphysical condition, before showing how the difficulties with the other two conditions are resolved through consideration of the social context in which they exhibit themselves. It will there be shown that the elements of character can, when considered *collectively*, fulfil the epistemological and practical conditions.

## The Passions

According to the metaphysical condition, character is the real property of persons which causes actions. Character is required to play not just a causal role, but a causal role with regard to actions. While for some philosophers this may be a minor point, in Hume's case it is emphasised by his moral psychology. Most significantly, Hume's explanation of action centres on the passions: "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will... [nor can it] oppose passion in the direction of the will."<sup>62</sup> (T 2.3.3.1; 413) The relation of character to the passions is thus of vital importance.

This central aspect of character has been developed by Jane McIntyre, primarily in her paper, 'Character: A Humean Account'. She develops an account of Hume on character that explicitly identifies character with passions, either individually or collectively. Further, her account, as I will show, fulfils all three of the conditions

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<sup>62</sup> It is not my concern here to fully analyse Hume's theory of the motivation of actions – doing so would require a thesis in itself – but the topic of character obviously has strong affinity with that topic. It is therefore important to note that Hume's avowed aims, quoted here from the beginning of T 2.3.3 'Of the Influencing Motives of the Will', do not imply anything about belief-desire pairs (i.e. the Humean theory of action). Indeed, the fact that reason alone cannot motivate action does not imply that only passions (or desires as a subset of passions) can motivate action. There is at least some evidence that each of the elements considered in this chapter is capable of motivating action. My reconstruction of Hume's conception of character therefore forms an argument for seeing his explanation of action as broader than sometimes suggested. For a more direct discussion of this topic, see Millgram, "Was Hume a Humean?" and Annette C. Baier, *Deeds & Character: Further Reflections on Hume* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), particularly the first essay, "Acting in Character": 3-21.

that were developed in Chapter One. But I will also argue that her account is not the correct or complete account of Hume on character, since the restriction of character to the passions alone cannot do justice to many of Hume's remarks about character. Nonetheless, McIntyre's account is a very good place to begin illustrating the different elements that are required to make up character for Hume and it is precisely through examination of the limitations of that account that I will develop the argument to show that there are multiple different elements involved in Hume's conception of character.

### ***The Apparent Conflict Between Personal Identity and Character***

McIntyre's approach to the problem of character in Hume comes through his account of personal identity rather than from the moral psychology. The idea of an enduring character, which grounds responsibility for actions, does not sit comfortably with Hume's 'bundle-theory' of the self:

These commonplace observations – that character traits endure and can exist without being continuously exercised – are hardly unproblematic in the context of the *Treatise*. As is well known, Hume rejected the view that the self is a substance, arguing instead that the self is a collection of perceptions, and perceptions are generally thought of as fleeting.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, Hume's own observations in 'Of Personal Identity' emphasise the fleeting nature of perceptions. He describes the bundle of perceptions as succeeding "each other with inconceivable rapidity," and being "in perpetual flux and movement." (T 1.4.6.4; 252) These descriptions are rhetorical overstatements, as all Hume requires for his refutation of the Cartesian conception of the self as an unchanging substance is that there is no impression that continues "invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since the self is suppos'd to exist after that manner," and his denial that any such "impression constant and invariable" (T 1.4.6.2; 251) exists does not require the kind of chaos that 'inconceivable rapidity' and 'perpetual flux' suggest. Hume clearly thinks that perceptions are connected through the association of impressions and ideas, and that this provides a kind of organisation, if not order,

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<sup>63</sup> McIntyre, "Character: A Humean Account," 195.

to the succession of our perceptions.<sup>64</sup> When he comes to give his account of personal identity (treating now of Locke's rather than Descartes' question) Hume argues as follows:

[I]dentity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them... 'Tis, therefore, on some of these three relations of resemblance, contiguity and causation, that [personal] identity depends... it follows, that our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the *smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas*, according to the principles above-explain'd. (T 1.4.6, 260, emphasis mine)

This 'smooth and uninterrupted progress' has a very different sense to that of 'inconceivable rapidity' and it is this kind of locution that we need to focus on if Hume's account of personal identity is to be made consistent with his account of character. It is important to keep in mind that, as McIntyre observes, for Hume, "Characters are durable, but not immutable."<sup>65</sup>

There is still a gap to be crossed here. Even if we emphasise that 'perpetual flux' and 'inconceivable rapidity' are unusual locutions that should not be unduly stressed, the very fact of the bundle-theory of the self poses a problem for an account of character. The 'smooth and uninterrupted progress' that Hume invokes later in the chapter does not suffice for continuation of character,<sup>66</sup> since such progress does not imply any kind of transitive relation. It is clearly possible that state  $A_1$  could smoothly pass to state  $A_2$ , then proceed to state  $A_3$  without interruption, but for there to be a significant discontinuity between  $A_1$  and  $A_3$ .

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<sup>64</sup> Anthony Pitson draws attention to Hume's claim at T 1.4.6.19; 261 "that the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions, which are link'd together..." Pitson argues that seeing the mind as a system is more in accord with Hume's aims, both in T 1.4.6 and his philosophy as a whole, than seeing it as a bundle. See Anthony E. Pitson, *Hume's Philosophy of the Self* (London: Routledge, 2002), 22-27.

<sup>65</sup> McIntyre, "Character: A Humean Account," 194. Note that this does not preclude radical changes of character, such as perhaps occur in religious conversions, but it does require that they are unusual.

<sup>66</sup> Whether it is sufficient for personal identity is certainly debatable, but that is not my concern here.

Indeed, such discontinuity is central to the way in which Hume sets up his problems of identity both of the self and of external objects. Yet for character to play the role that Hume requires of it, it must be (at least normally) continuous from  $A_1$  to  $A_3$ .

This problem can be solved, according to McIntyre, through the recognition that Hume has quite a broad conception of what counts as a perception. Perceptions are divided by Hume into impressions and ideas. The impressions are then further subdivided into “original impressions or impressions of sensation” and “secondary or reflective impressions.” The former arise “without any antecedent perception.” The latter “proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea.” Hume continues, “Of the first kind are all impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them.” (T 2.1.1.1; 275) McIntyre proposes that this relatively wide notion of perceptions offers us a novel solution to the problem of the apparent inconsistency between the bundle theory of the self and the enduring nature of character. She says,

[The] apparent inconsistency arises... from construing Hume’s concept of perception too narrowly. For Hume, the category of perceptions includes the passions: pride, humility, love, hatred, desire, aversion, compassion, respect, and the long catalogue of feelings and emotions whose workings are described in Book II of the *Treatise*... The passions are mental qualities that cause actions and are more durable than other perceptions. They are, therefore, real components of the Humean self that provide a foundation for the attribution of character to persons that is free from the ontological commitment to a substantial self.<sup>67</sup>

When talking of the ‘perpetual flux’ of our perceptions Hume observes, “Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions.” (T 1.4.6.4; 252) What he has in mind when emphasising the changeable nature of the bundle of perceptions are the impressions of sensation. The impressions of reflection behave in a different manner, which Hume expresses with a memorable metaphor:

Now if we consider the human mind, we shall find, that with regard to the passions, ’tis not of the nature of a wind-instrument of music, which in running

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<sup>67</sup> McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” 200.

over all the notes immediately loses the sound after the breath ceases; but rather resembles a string-instrument, where after each stroke the vibrations still retain some sound, which gradually and insensibly decays.

He continues,

The imagination is extremely quick and agile; but the passions are slow and restive: For which reason, when any object is presented, that affords a variety of views to the one, and emotions to the other; tho' the fancy may change its views with great celerity; each stroke will not produce a clear and distinct note of passion. (T 2.3.9.12; 440-1)

It can thus be seen that the passions, as impressions of reflection, have a continuity and durability which the impressions of sensation do not. They therefore suggest themselves as strong candidates for the composition of character.

### ***Causation and Knowledge***

Placing the passions so centrally in the Humean account of character as McIntyre does avoids any problem arising concerning the causation of actions. As observed at the beginning of the chapter, reason alone cannot motivate action. But if character is constituted by the passions then it is easy to explain how character causes actions, or at least it is no more difficult than Hume's moral psychology itself. It is also clear that McIntyre's identification of character with passions fulfils the metaphysical condition. The passions are 'real components of the Humean self'.

McIntyre's passions account also fulfils the epistemological and practical conditions. Hume holds that we can know the passions of others through our natural capacity for sympathy. Sympathy, on Hume's account, allows for the transfer of a passion from one person to another. This process is neither simple nor unmediated. The first stage involves getting the idea of the passion felt by another. This is initially a matter of drawing inferences from external signs, such as actions. Once we have got this idea the process of sympathy heightens the idea's vivacity to such a degree that it becomes an impression, and one of a similar quality to that perceived.

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects,

and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection. (T 2.1.11.3; 317)

The heightening of the idea to the status of an impression is explained through the relations of resemblance and contiguity. More specifically, Hume is committed to the claim that, to a very large degree, human beings are all structurally similar.

[N]ature has preserv'd a great resemblance among all human creatures... The case is the same with the fabric of the mind, as with that of the body. However the parts may differ in shape and size, their structure and composition are in general the same.<sup>68,69</sup> (T 2.1.11.5; 318)

In the context of sympathy, Hume again uses the metaphor of the passions being like vibrating strings: "As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget corresponding movements in every human creature." (T 3.3.1.7; 576)

McIntyre stresses that the mechanism of sympathy "enables passions to be *communicated*, not merely *represented*," before going on to claim "that we respond directly to the characters and passions of others. In this respect, sympathy seems to present us with a kind of knowledge of other minds."<sup>70</sup> If character can be explained in terms of the passions, then Hume has the perfect resource within his philosophy to explain how we can know of the character of another person, although he never explicitly makes the move himself. Through the operation of sympathy, then, it is shown that we *can* have knowledge of character, fulfilling the epistemological condition, and further that often we *do* have knowledge of character, fulfilling the

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<sup>68</sup> I touched upon this fundamental commitment of Hume's in Chapter One (p. 23). There the focus was upon the constant conjunction of characters and actions. Here the same principle is being applied, but with a slightly different emphasis.

<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, for the present topic, he goes on to say, "Accordingly we find, that where, beside the general resemblance of our natures, there is any peculiar similarity in our manners, or *character*, or country, or language, it facilitates the sympathy." (Emphasis mine)

<sup>70</sup> McIntyre, "Character: A Humean Account," 204.



practical condition. Moreover, it is not the case that McIntyre makes knowledge of character so commonplace that there is no possibility of error.

Sympathy does not, of course, give us infallible knowledge of the mental qualities of the other person... [A]ctions do not transparently reveal intentions (T [3.1.1.15;] 461). Furthermore, sympathy accounts for the emotions we may feel while watching a dramatic performance (EPM [5.26;]221-2)... [But] although the operation of sympathy does not in every case provide knowledge of the passions and character, it may create the conditions which make a more reflective knowledge of character possible.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that the process is neither simple nor unmediated indicates that mistakes can be made. Sympathy is mediated through ideas and ideas can, of course, be false, even though Hume holds that passions cannot (T 2.3.3.5; 415). Sympathy, as a means of knowledge of character, thus steers a course between the requirements of the epistemological and practical conditions. It neither sets the bar too low, failing to account for error, nor sets the bar too high, failing to account for common knowledge of character.

### ***‘Presently Unperceived Perceptions’***

There is a structural similarity between McIntyre’s position and that of Bricke. Bricke’s account sets a project whereby we are required to search for a non-dispositional property  $\varphi$ , which acts as a placeholder for a character trait in the non-reductionist account of dispositions:

$$(3) (\exists \varphi) [\varphi_a \ \& \ (\forall \chi) ([\varphi_\chi \ \& \ O_\chi] \rightarrow R_\chi)].$$

McIntyre’s account is entirely congruent with Bricke’s, except that instead of cashing out  $\varphi$  in physiological terms she identifies a non-dispositional property that is a genuine feature of the bundle of perceptions that constitutes the self, namely a passion or set of passions. She therefore cashes out  $\varphi$  in terms of mental properties. Bricke, despite not giving a full argument for why he considered  $\varphi$  to be a matter of physiological states of the brain, does provide reasons for rejecting any account which cashes out  $\varphi$  in terms of mental properties. His first reason can be dismissed,

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<sup>71</sup> McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” 204.

since it relies on the bundle theory found in T 1.4.6 ruling out any enduring perceptions, but this has already been shown to be mistaken.<sup>72</sup> His second reason is more forceful. He argues, “[N]o mental candidate [of  $\phi$ ]... [could] be provided, if  $\phi$  is taken to designate some presently unknown property, since this would commit Hume to presently unperceived perceptions.”<sup>73</sup>

This objection gets its force from the first person case. It is not only the spectator who may be mistaken about someone’s character: people may be, and often are, mistaken about their own characters. Indeed, as Hume observes, “We may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves; but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character.” (T 2.3.2.2; 408 & EHU 8.22n; 94n) For this to be the case, it must be at least possible for us to be unaware of our own characters. If we are to take character to be a matter of a particular kind of perception, namely passions, then we are committing Hume to the view that we are having a present perception but that that perception is presently unknown.

There are several ways to respond to this challenge. One is to claim that we do have a present perception and that we do, in fact, know that we are having it, but that we are, for some reason, incapable of recognising it as the perception that it is. Hume indicates that one way in which this might happen is through the lack of an appropriate basis of comparison. This is a particular problem in the case of pride: “No one can well distinguish *in himself* betwixt the vice and virtue, or be certain, that his esteem of his own merit is well-founded.” (T 3.3.2.10; 597-98) In someone who does not have, or does not avail himself of, an appropriate comparison this can become highly objectionable:

[W]hen a man, whom we are really perswaded to be of inferior merit, is presented to us; if we observe in him any extraordinary degree of pride and self-conceit; the firm perswasion he has of his own merit, takes hold of the imagination, and diminishes us in our own eyes, in the same manner, as if he were really possess’d of all the good qualities which he so liberally attributes to himself. (T 3.3.2.6; 595)

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<sup>72</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 18-19.

<sup>73</sup> Bricke, “Dispositional Properties,” 21.

It is also clear from Hume's description of the proud man as liberally attributing good qualities to himself that he may not merely be mistaken in terms of pride but also of other aspects of his character as well. And this is all based upon making poor comparisons:

[T]he proud never can endure the proud, and rather seek the company of those who are of the opposite disposition... [T]hose, who have an ill-grounded conceit of themselves, are for ever making those comparisons, nor have they any other method of supporting their vanity. A man of sense and merit is pleas'd with himself, independent of all foreign considerations: But a fool must always find some person, that is more foolish, in order to keep himself in good humour. (T 3.3.2.7; 596)<sup>74</sup>

But while these observations show how in some cases people may be mistaken about character because they are mistaken about the nature of their own perceptions, it does not go far enough to rebut Bricke's charge that cashing out  $\varphi$  in terms of the passions commits Hume to presently unperceived perceptions, for there is no reason to suppose that such mistakes are *always* the result of misplaced comparisons. Nor does it really get to the crux of the problem, since by hypothesis we are sometimes able to know that we have a particular character without knowing the property  $\varphi$ . For example, I am well aware that I often become irritable when I am cooking, but I am not aware of the general cause of such irritability. The awareness I have of certain passions when I am in an irritable state while cooking is no indicator of that general aspect of my character, since my character is that which explains my getting into such heightened emotional states rather than the states themselves. Nor can the explanation be given in terms of my having a disposition of irritability while cooking, since this begs the question. There is no dispute about whether or not I am disposed to irritability while cooking; the dispute concerns how to cash out the non-dispositional property  $\varphi$  which explains my disposition. McIntyre's hypothesis entails that there be an enduring passion, and hence a perception, present in the bundle even when I am not cooking. It is clear that, if there is such a perception, I am mostly, perhaps invariably, unaware of it, especially when I am neither cooking nor thinking about cooking.

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<sup>74</sup> I discuss the moral implications of Hume's observations in this passage in Chapter Five (p. 165).

The suggestion that there is a passion which I presently have but of which I am somehow *unaware* provides an alternative way to avoid Bricke's charge. Talk of 'presently unperceived perceptions' is incoherent, but there is nothing incoherent about talk of 'present perceptions of which I am unaware'. The classic example is that of the ticking of the clock that is only noticed when the clock stops. One apparently perceived the ticking all the time, but was in some sense not aware of it until it ceased. How we exactly characterise this case is a serious philosophical problem. Do we say that we weren't perceiving it, because perceptions intrinsically carry awareness with them? Or do we say that there are some perceptions of which we are aware and others of which we are unaware? Both options are problematic, but this need not greatly concern us, since Hume explicitly commits himself to the latter option:

Now 'tis certain, there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, tho' they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are known more by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. (T 2.3.3.8; 417)

And a couple of pages later:

[W]hen a passion has once become a settled principle of action, and is the predominant inclination of the soul, it commonly produces no longer any sensible agitation. As repeated custom and its own force have made everything yield to it, it directs the actions and conduct without that opposition and emotion, which so naturally attend every momentary gust of passion. We must, therefore, distinguish betwixt a calm and a weak passion; betwixt a violent and a strong one.<sup>75</sup> (T 2.3.4.1; 418-9)

It could hardly be more clear that Hume does include in his concept of perception some things of which we are not currently aware.<sup>76</sup> McIntyre explicitly relies on the doctrine of the calm passions in constructing her account. She observes, "The phrases 'settled principle of action' and 'directing conduct' could certainly count as descriptions of character," and that Hume's description of the passions "as longer

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<sup>75</sup> This passage is quoted by McIntyre, "Character: A Humean Account," 201.

<sup>76</sup> In the second passage he comes close to saying that there are perceptions of which we cannot any longer be aware, in that they 'no longer produce any sensible agitation.' If Hume really means that this is a perception that is not just presently unperceived but is in principle unperceivable then there is a problem here.

lasting than other perceptions, and slower to change... is particularly true with respect to the calm passions.” She further appeals to Hume’s account of “strength of mind, another important character trait, [which] is described in the *Treatise* as the *prevalence* of the calm passions over the violent (T [2.3.3.10;] 418).”<sup>77</sup>

Focus on the calm passions thus allows McIntyre’s account to avoid Bricke’s charge that cashing out  $\phi$  in terms of mental properties must commit Hume to ‘presently unperceived perceptions’. In the calm passions Hume explicitly endorses a category of perceptions that endure, direct action and of which we are not always aware.

### ***The Strength of McIntyre’s Claim***

How strong is the claim that McIntyre is making here? She is not committed to saying that a person’s complete set of passions is identical to her character. It is quite clear that there are some passions which are not part of someone’s character. For example, my momentary irritation at the oil in the pan being too hot is not necessarily part of my character, even though it is characteristic of me that I am irritated by the mistakes I make when cooking. Anything that is to contribute to character itself must be durable. As we have seen, Hume argues that the passions are more durable than other perceptions, but this does not entail that all passions are equally durable. In particular, as McIntyre says, the calm passions are typically longer lasting and slower to change than the violent passions. Although this is not implied in Hume’s initial distinction between the two, which simply describes the calm passions as being a matter of “the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects,” and the violent passions as being “love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility,” he immediately admits that this distinction is “far from exact” and even “vulgar and specious.” (T 2.1.1.3; 276) Later he develops his distinction in terms of whether or not they cause “disorder in the soul.” (T 2.3.3.8; 417) Furthermore, if Hume really held that the indirect passions of love and hatred, pride and humility were always and invariably violent

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<sup>77</sup> McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” 201. See also Jane L. McIntyre, “Strength of Mind: Prospects and Problems for a Humean Account,” *Synthese* 152 (2006).

passions, then the link between the calm passions and character that McIntyre draws would be inapposite, since Hume insists that it is precisely these passions, and their cognates, that are required in morality.<sup>78</sup>

None of this requires that violent passions do not endure over long periods of time in some cases. It is compatible with Hume's account for someone to have an enduring anger,<sup>79</sup> say, without this anger ever decaying "into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible." (T 2.1.1.3; 276) Nor is it required that the calm passions always endure for long periods of time. As Hume's initial distinction makes clear, the paradigm cases of the calm passions are aesthetic, and it need not be the case that such experiences are peculiarly more durable than other emotional experiences. The metaphor of vibrating strings applies to both the violent and the calm passions, but both 'gradually and insensibly decay.'

McIntyre's definition of character is drawn in terms of passions that endure rather than those that are necessarily calm, even though it is expected that most passions that will prove durable will be calm. She ultimately proposes "that on a Humean view, character is the structured set of relatively stable passions that give rise to a person's actions."<sup>80</sup> This is a fairly strong claim: McIntyre's 'is' identifies character with the passions and *exclusively* with the passions.

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<sup>78</sup> Here I am agreeing with Páll S. Árdal, who writes, "Hume's statements [concerning moral approval and disapproval] make sense only if there is a strict parallel between the principles accounting for the origin of the indirect passions and those accounting for the origin of approval and disapproval of persons." See Páll S. Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 109-113, quotation from 112.

<sup>79</sup> One possible example of such a character is Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, whom Hume describes as having a long running "animosity against the favourites" of Henry III (H 2:33), and later refers to, "The violence, ingratitude, tyranny, rapacity and treachery of the earl of Leicester." (H 2:60)

<sup>80</sup> McIntyre, "Character: A Humean Account," 201.

## ***Hume's Exclusion of a 'Hasty Temper'***

At risk of a slight digression, there is a rather peculiar and puzzling qualification that Hume makes in his discussion of responsibility in 'Of Liberty and Necessity', which is worthy of comment. He suggests,

Men are less blam'd for such evil actions as they perform hastily and unpremeditatedly, than for such as proceed from thought and deliberation. For what reason? But because a hasty temper, tho' a constant cause in the mind, operates only by intervals, and infects not the whole character. (T 2.3.2.7; 412)

The first part of this appears satisfactory as far as it goes; we do indeed distinguish between premeditated murder and manslaughter, for example. Admittedly we still hold people accountable for negligence, but this is not something Hume is concerned to deny – his point is that people are 'less blam'd' rather than not blamed at all. But his explanation of why people are 'less blam'd' for their hasty actions is peculiar. A 'hasty temper' appears to be exactly the kind of thing that we do attribute to the character of a person. Moreover, it is clearly a character defect and in many cases a moral vice. We do not say of a man who frequently loses his temper and lashes out at his wife that his actions are mitigated by the fact that he merely has a hasty temper.<sup>81</sup> We expect, even require, the man to be able to control himself.

It would be convenient to be able to simply dismiss this as a momentary and careless thought, i.e. to forgive Hume on the exact grounds he is discussing, were it not for the fact that the same thought is expressed in almost exactly the same words in the *First Enquiry* (EHU 8.30; 98-99). It is therefore hard to deny that Hume really did think that a hasty temper, despite being 'a constant cause in the mind,' could be excluded, or at least sidelined, in someone's character. The peculiarity of this comment of Hume's lies in the fact that the answer to the question that he sets himself has a much broader scope than the question required. He hardly needed to invoke such an apparently durable quality, and hence potential quality of character,

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<sup>81</sup> This is, of course, only one possible understanding of Hume's expression 'hasty temper'. I will carry this example of 'hasty temper' through the discussion here, taking it to mean something like 'irascibility', but 'impetuosity' may be closer to what Hume actually had in mind.

as a hasty temper to answer the question of why people are not considered as much to blame for rash and ill-considered actions as they are for those which are premeditated. Everyone performs hasty actions every now and then; we attribute a hasty temper only to those who do so often.

What could explain Hume's thinking that an exception may be made for a hasty temper? Possibly he had in mind the fact that someone may in many ways be a very good person, but occasionally lose his temper and do something which we may describe as 'out of character'. The man who loses his temper and lashes out at his wife may normally be loving and respectful towards her, and soon after lashing out he may be mortified about his doing so. While this does not incline us to wipe off his guilt, it may incline us to some kind of sympathy with him. In many ways people subject to extreme loss of temper are similar to people who are being acted upon by something outside their control. Perhaps we can liken it to someone doing something whilst drunk or high on drugs. They are still the person performing the actions, and they are still culpable for them, but there is a partial explanation of their actions, apart from the things specific about them.

The comparison with alcohol or drugs brings with it additional problems, so it is best not to carry it too far. In any case there is a significant disanalogy in that a hasty temper is something much more intimately connected to a person. We may say of a single action that it is 'out of character' but not of something that someone does repeatedly. In such a situation we are more likely to revise our ideas about the person's character. We may, for example, say, "I always thought he was such a nice, respectful person, but now I've seen him lose his temper with his wife so many times I think I must have been mistaken." Even of singular actions that may be described as 'out of character' there may be an explanation given in terms of character. Much of Annette Baier's recent book *Death & Character* involves prolonged meditations on the supposedly out of character actions of various historical figures. In each case, she concludes that one part of character can explain another. "It is most unlikely that any of us ever act totally out of character... When we act out of character in some respect, it will be still in character in another



respect.”<sup>82</sup>

Hume’s comment that a hasty temper can be excluded from character is hard to justify and it is here perhaps appropriate to correct him. In terms of his conception of character as a whole little hangs upon his remark. We can still answer the question as to why unpremeditated actions are not considered to be as culpable as those performed out of premeditation, without any reference to an enduring state of the person such as their hasty temper. ‘Hasty temper’ then can be included in the domain of character, even on a Humean account.

## **Natural Abilities**

McIntyre’s identification of character with a suitably restricted set of passions has been shown to fulfil all three of the conditions set out in Chapter One. It is also capable of explaining how character manages to be durable, despite its identification of character with a type of perception and hence the bundle which Hume introduces in T 1.4.6. However, there are reasons for finding McIntyre’s analysis unsatisfactory. In what follows I will maintain that McIntyre’s account is only a partial account of Hume’s comments on character. It fares very well if we restrict character to being a narrowly moral concept, but less well when character is expanded to include other aspects of life, or when we construe ‘moral’ broadly, as Hume is apt to do.

Setting up the aims of her paper, McIntyre writes,

[A] person’s character is made up of durable principles of mind, or mental qualities, which both cause actions and serve as the basis of our moral evaluations... This paper attempts to reconstruct the concept of character implicit in Hume’s moral philosophy in the context of his metaphysical and epistemological arguments. My primary focus will be to answer the question of whether Hume’s analyses of self and causation can accommodate the view of

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<sup>82</sup> Baier, *Death & Character*, 20. Her fourth essay, “Hume’s Treatment of Oliver Cromwell,” 58-80, is a prolonged meditation on this topic.

character required by his moral philosophy.<sup>83</sup>

It has been shown that she succeeds in the aim of reconciling her account of Hume on character with his analyses of self and causation. Her account can also explain how character is able to cause actions. It is less clear whether her account can ‘serve as the basis of our moral evaluations’. This phrase is rather ambiguous. Does McIntyre mean that it is people’s characters that we evaluate when we make moral evaluations? This is certainly the case, according to Hume, and if this is what McIntyre means then there is no problem for her here. But character also serves as the basis of our *making* moral evaluations; the character of the judge is central to Hume’s usage of the concept, and on this topic McIntyre is largely silent. The character of the judge will be introduced in Chapter Three, and developed in detail in Chapters Four and Five. For now I merely note it as a potential problem for McIntyre.

What is more pertinent here is McIntyre’s restriction of her aims to consider ‘the concept of character implicit in Hume’s moral philosophy’. The restriction, implicit or explicit, of Hume’s conception of character to moral contexts is not peculiar to McIntyre. It is made implicitly by Eugenio Lecaldano, when he says that character is the self as it appears when we are proud of our moral qualities.<sup>84</sup> Susan Purviance’s restriction is implicit in her explanation of character as a (brute) fact of moral evaluation and agency,<sup>85</sup> and she goes further to claim, “[T]he relation between the moral self and character is constitutive.”<sup>86</sup> Costelloe makes a similar restriction, but his view links character to linguistic practices: “[O]nly a limited set of concepts make up specifically *moral* language and, subsequently, are relevant to the formation of character... Character, then, on this view, consists in the appropriate attribution of a moral category in order to account for the action in question.”<sup>87</sup> Finally, Bricke baldly states the restriction as Hume’s own: “[Hume]

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<sup>83</sup> McIntyre, “Character: A Humean Account,” 193.

<sup>84</sup> Lecaldano, “Passions, Character, and the Self,” 190.

<sup>85</sup> Purviance, “The Moral Self,” 209.

<sup>86</sup> Purviance, “The Moral Self,” 210.

<sup>87</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 407.

typically restricts the class of character traits to those mental attributes which play a distinctively motivational role in the determination of human behaviour.”<sup>88</sup>

It is quite easy to see why this move is so often made. ‘Character’ is a word with significant moral overtones, and it is most often with an interest in Hume’s moral philosophy that commentators approach Hume’s use of the term. The restriction of character to a moral context by Hume’s commentators echoes one made by Richard Brandt in his conceptual analysis of traits of character in general. He lists several terms that he calls “character-trait-names,” going on to contend that these pick out “a fairly definite set of traits, roughly identical with the set of what have traditionally been called moral virtues or moral vices.”<sup>89</sup> But it is a mistake to carry this too far, at least if we are interested in Hume’s conception of character. As was shown in the Introduction and Chapter One, Hume’s usage of the concept of character extends far beyond moral contexts. Joel Kupperman sums up the subtlety of this point very well when he observes,

If *character*, in most of its uses, has to do with the ways in which we most commonly tend to think and act, then the thoughts and actions that are related to moral choice loom the largest... [But] it would be a mistake to link the concept of character too closely to morality... We tend to exclude from the realm of morality subtle patterns in human relationships that do much to affect the happiness of friends and loved ones... yet something of this sort can play a major role in our account of a character.<sup>90</sup>

Hume makes pretty much the same point when he questions the distinction between the moral virtues and the natural abilities:

There are few, who are not as jealous of their character, with regard to sense and knowledge, as to honour and courage; and much more than with regard to temperance and sobriety. Men are even afraid of passing for good-natur’d; lest *that* shou’d be taken for want of understanding: And often boast of more debauches than they have been really engag’d in, to give themselves airs of fire and spirit. In

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<sup>88</sup> Bricke, “Hume’s Conception of Character,” 249.

<sup>89</sup> Richard B. Brandt, “Traits of Character: A Conceptual Analysis,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1970): 23-24.

<sup>90</sup> Kupperman, *Character*, 7-8.

short, the figure a man makes in the world, the reception he meets with in company, the esteem paid him by his acquaintance; all these advantages depend almost as much upon his good sense and judgement, as upon any other part of his character. (T 3.3.4.1; 607)

Hume doesn't make clear exactly what the distinction is supposed to be between the moral virtues and the natural abilities. In the passage just cited he appears to be making the distinction very much along intellectual lines. He mentions sense, knowledge, understanding and judgement. This certainly captures one dimension of the distinction and in the present context it proves important, since there is no way that these intellectual capacities can be understood to be Humean passions, but it does not capture the entire distinction. A paragraph later Hume adds "wit and humour" to the list (T 3.3.4.2; 608) and a little later still adds prudence (T 3.3.4.4; 609).<sup>91</sup>

Another way of drawing the distinction is to focus on the naturalness of the natural abilities. In this sense, Hume says, "Those, who represent the distinction betwixt natural abilities and moral virtues as very material, may say, that the former are entirely involuntary, and have therefore no merit attending them, as having no dependence on liberty and free-will." (T 3.3.4.3; 608) He gives three responses to this, all of which involve bringing the moral virtues closer to the natural abilities on this count, i.e. in backing up his arguments in T 2.3.1. This is not in itself surprising, but he goes further to claim that the natural abilities "are almost invariable by any art or industry." (T 3.3.4.4; 609) This claim does not sit easily with the list of natural abilities as being intellectual capacities. While it is reasonable to suppose that our intellectual capacities are to some extent determined

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<sup>91</sup> In the latter half of the section Hume pushes things to the point of absurdity, discussing cleanliness and handsomeness as being virtues. It is difficult to tell whether this is meant sincerely or ironically. On the one hand, his discussion of these qualities is consistent with his argument as a whole and could be taken to be logically entailed by his general discussion. On the other hand, his comment that lack of cleanliness causes uneasiness in others and is therefore a vice is as likely an objection to his theory as support for it, which makes his decision to include it difficult unless it is understood to be ironical overstatement. When he treats of the same subject in Appendix 4 of the *Second Enquiry* the only mention of cleanliness is in the context of a quotation from Cicero (EPM, App. 4.10).

by our nature (birth/genes), it is surely the case that our knowledge, understanding and judgement can be improved through education;<sup>92</sup> one need not choose here between nature and nurture. Hume's more considered opinion certainly allows for the possibility of our intellectual capacities being improved and I will later contend that the improvement of our judgement, at least, is central to Hume's aesthetic as well as his moral philosophy.

When Hume returns to the subject in Appendix Four of the *Second Enquiry* he is more sensible of the difficulties and ambiguities in the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues. The term 'natural abilities' itself is then dropped in favour of 'talents', and the discussion begins with a discussion of three ways in which the boundaries of the classes denoted by the terms may be fixed. He considers that they may be distinguished in terms of voluntary and involuntary, but that "courage, equanimity, patience, self-command; and many others... are entitled to the appellation of virtues." Then he considers distinguishing between them on grounds of intellectual and moral, with "the last alone [regarded as] the real and genuine virtues, because they alone lead to action." But there are various qualities that seem to fall on the intellectual side of this distinction, "such as prudence, penetration, discernment, discretion, [which have] also a considerable influence on conduct."<sup>93</sup> Finally, he considers that a distinction might be made "between the *heart* and the *head*." The moral virtues, belonging to the heart, are supposed to be "in their immediate exertion... accompanied with a feeling or sentiment," while the talents are not. "But industry, frugality, temperance, secrecy, perseverance, and many other laudable powers or habits... are exerted without any immediate sentiment." He concludes that "the question, being merely verbal, cannot possibly be of any importance." (EPM App. 4.2; 313-14)

Hume's earlier difficulties in drawing the distinction accurately are thus later treated as being part of the argument itself: those who pretend that there is a sharp

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<sup>92</sup> It is perhaps a little more difficult to see how our wit or humour can be so improved, although that is not to say that they cannot be educated.

<sup>93</sup> This is a very clear indication that an exclusive focus on sections about the inertness of reason (e.g. T 2.3.3 & 3.1.1) leads to a distorted picture of Hume's moral psychology.

distinction fail to notice that however they draw it there is always something that they would claim to be a moral virtue on the side of the natural abilities, or vice-versa. This is not to say that Hume dismisses the distinction altogether. He is maintaining that there are a wide variety of qualities or abilities of which we approve or disapprove. We come to approve or disapprove of these qualities in similar ways, whether they are traditionally regarded as moral virtues or not, but this is not to say that we come to appreciate all qualities in the same way. Nor is the feeling of approbation the same for all qualities:

Each of the virtues, even benevolence, justice, gratitude, integrity, excites a different sentiment or feeling in the spectator... In like manner, the approbation, which attends natural abilities, may be somewhat different to the feeling from that, which arises from the other virtues, without making them entirely of a different species. And indeed we may observe, that the natural abilities, no more than the other virtues, produce not, all of them, the same kind of approbation. Good sense and genius beget esteem: Wit and humour excite love. (T 3.3.4.2; 607-608)

Although Hume does not say so explicitly, it is clearly possible on this view that the feeling of approbation produced by a particular natural ability may be closer to the feeling of approbation produced by a particular moral virtue than it is to that produced by another natural ability and vice versa. For example, integrity, like good sense and genius, may beget esteem, while benevolence, like wit and humour, excites love. Hume's point is that there are a wide variety of qualities that we admire or have affection for in ourselves and in others; trying to separate these qualities into two distinct classes is largely fruitless. It is certainly philosophically 'of little consequence' and can safely be left to the grammarians.

The natural abilities are treated as being highly similar to the moral virtues in Hume's philosophy. This includes treating them as being as much a part of character as the moral virtues. But even though the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues cannot be clearly drawn on intellectual lines, or indeed in any other way, the natural abilities do include certain intellectual capacities, namely good sense, knowledge, understanding, and judgement, as well as capacities such as wit and good humour. Consequently, character for Hume includes certain intellectual capacities as well as moral virtues. The link between character and the motivation of actions remains, but character must be understood to be broader than

a merely moral concept and as contributing more to Hume's philosophy than merely being the cause of actions.

Hume is committed to certain properties of persons contributing to character that go beyond the passions. Consequently, McIntyre's account can be, at most, a partial account of Hume on character. It may be sufficient to explain 'the view of character required by his moral philosophy,' but it is insufficient to explain the view of character required by his philosophy as a whole. Moreover, there is never any suggestion that Hume considers the natural abilities to be anything other than real properties of persons. They therefore satisfy the metaphysical condition. Quite how we discover such properties is not explained by Hume, and hence they are potentially problematic in terms of the epistemological and practical conditions. Such problems are postponed until Chapter Three. It is, however, worth observing that the natural abilities are far from being a momentary aberration in Hume's philosophy, appearing in a couple of isolated sections but not elsewhere. As I will show in Chapter Four, the natural abilities are central to Hume's aesthetics; the character of the soldier, given in 'Of National Characters,' includes that they are "thoughtless and ignorant" (Essays 199); and there are numerous examples of natural abilities in the character descriptions to be found in the *History*: Henry VIII is said to have had "great vigour of mind... though [this quality] lay not always under the guidance of a regular and solid judgment," (H 3:322) and Charles I's "good sense was disfigured by a deference to persons of a capacity inferior to his own." (H 5:542)

## Education and Habits

Another element of Hume's conception of character can be found in his notion of habit, which is first introduced in T 1.1.7, 'Of Abstract Ideas.' In this context Hume discusses the way that a word applies to a multitude of instances. Following Locke, he suggests that when we hear a word we form an idea in our mind,<sup>94</sup> but, following

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<sup>94</sup> Significantly, given the general implausibility of this theory of language, Hume backtracks on this later, saying, "[A]fter the frequent use of terms... [we] omit the idea, which we wou'd express by them, and... preserve only the custom." (T 1.4.3.10; 224) Locke holds that words are the "sensible

Berkeley, that there is no possibility of the idea so formed being an abstract idea. Hume's account is, however, subtly different from Berkeley's. While Berkeley holds that we form a particular idea but treat it as a general or abstract idea by considering it "without attending to the particular qualities,"<sup>95</sup> Hume holds that we form a particular idea but that the word also "revives that custom," which puts us "in a readiness to survey any of them." (T 1.1.7.7; 20) The upshot of Hume's theory is the same as Berkeley's. When we conduct a proof on a triangle, we attend to certain features in order to do the proof. However, on Hume's account custom<sup>96</sup> is continually present, such that if a feature to which we attend differs in another of the instances to which the general term applies, custom will "readily suggest any other individual... and make us perceive the falsehood of this proposition." (T 1.1.7.8; 21)

The influence of custom and habit is also highlighted by Hume in connection with education. At first this is very much related to ideas becoming associated in the mind, in a similar way to how our ideas of causes and effects get associated to such an extent as to become inseparable (T 1.3.9.17; 116),<sup>97</sup> but later Hume explicitly links custom and education to character. "The great force of custom and education... mould the human mind from its infancy and form it into a fixed and established character." (EHU 8.11; 86) In 'The Sceptic' Hume goes further:

The prodigious effects of education may convince us, that the mind is not altogether stubborn and inflexible, but will admit of many alterations from its

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marks of ideas." John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 3.2.1 (see also 3.3.6), in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1990).

<sup>95</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Intr. §16 in *Philosophical Works*, ed. Michael R. Ayers (Everyman: London, 1975).

<sup>96</sup> I am assuming that Hume uses the words 'custom' and 'habit' interchangeably.

<sup>97</sup> Here Hume's discussion is surprisingly negative. His implication is that educational associations are a kind of deeply-rooted falsehood. This mistrust of custom and education is prevalent in Francis Hutcheson's, *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004). (See particularly Treatise One, Section VII.) Hume's attitude is generally more positive. It is also interesting to consider this discussion in connection with general rules, which I discuss later in this chapter, p. 73.



original make and structure. Let a man propose to himself the model of a character, which he approves: Let him be well acquainted with those particulars, in which his own character deviates from this model: Let him keep a constant watch over himself, and bend his mind, by a continual effort, from the vices, towards the virtues; and I doubt not but, in time, he will find, in his temper, an alteration for the better. (Essays 170)<sup>98</sup>

There is a lot going on in this passage, but it is clear that Hume is talking here about a kind of intentional habit-forming. In the following paragraph he discusses habit explicitly, before concluding, “Here then is the chief triumph of art and philosophy: It insensibly refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavour to attain, by a constant *bent* of the mind, and by repeated *habit*.” (Essays 171) Such a ‘constant bent of the mind’ requires some kind of motivation behind it – Hume remarks that it requires “a man be, before-hand, tolerably virtuous” – so it is reasonable to conclude that it requires some kind of (calm) passion, but the habit formed through such procedures need not be a passion of any kind; Hume’s treatment here indicates that habits are influential on the passions rather than being passions themselves.<sup>99</sup>

There is no suggestion here that habits could be cashed out in terms of passions. In contrast, habits are closely allied to the imagination (T 1.1.7.10; 22). As we saw earlier (p. 47), imagination is contrasted with the passions on a point central to McIntyre’s argument, in that it is ‘quick and agile’ as opposed to being ‘slow and restive’. It would, of course, be a contradiction in terms to suppose that a habit were ‘quick and agile’ in this sense, since in that case it would be no kind of habit at all, but this is precisely what gives habits their importance. The imagination is not liable to settle on any particular idea solidly enough to warrant the name ‘belief’.

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<sup>98</sup> In ‘The Sceptic’ Hume is presenting views through the voice of an imagined Sceptic. It is, therefore, problematic to identify the Sceptic of the essay with Hume himself. However, the views presented in ‘The Sceptic’ show a marked similarity to many of the views presented by Hume in his standard essays and philosophical works, making it reasonable to suppose that Hume is closer to the Sceptic than he is to the Epicurean, Stoic or Platonist. In the present case, compare the passage at T 3.2.2.4; 486.

<sup>99</sup> The same suggestion is made in the passage from T 2.3.4.1; 418-19, which I quoted earlier, p. 52.

Consequently, habits are required to act as a corrective to the agility of the imagination. The context of the passage in which the imagination and the passions are contrasted in terms of the ‘celerity’ with which the imagination can ‘change its views’ is that of a discussion of fear and hope. These passions are produced only in situations where we lack certainty, for if we are certain the passions of grief or joy are produced instead (T 2.3.9.9; 439-40). The context is therefore one of probability, which Hume restates as follows:

Probability arises from an opposition of contrary chances or causes, by which the mind is not allow’d to fix on either side, but is incessantly tost from one to another, and at one moment is determin’d to consider an object as existent, and at another moment as the contrary. (T 2.3.9.10; 440)

This fits perfectly with the description of the imagination as ‘quick and agile’, but such probability is only possible if there are some cases in which the mind *is* able to fix on one side. In such cases as these, fixing of the mind on one side or the other is termed ‘belief’ and is produced by custom and habit according to Hume (T 1.3.8.10; 102-103). And while belief is a matter of the imagination in the sense in which Hume uses it as being close to understanding, it is contrasted with the imagination in the sense which Hume often calls ‘fancy’:

An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firminess*, or *steadiness*. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them *a superior influence on the passions and imagination*...<sup>100</sup> The imagination has the command over all its ideas, and can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible. But... it is impossible, that the faculty can ever, of itself, reach belief, ’tis evident, that belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind. (T 1.3.7.7; 629)

In the latter half of the paragraph the imagination is referred to in terms which are of a piece with ‘quick and agile’, but it is contrasted with belief. Custom and habit work on the imagination to produce belief, which is characterised in terms of

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<sup>100</sup> This emphasis added. The earlier emphases are found in the original.

solidity, firmness or steadiness, among others, and which give it ‘a superior influence on the passions’. Custom and habit are *associated* with the imagination, not *identified* with it.

It seems, then, unlikely that habits could be understood in terms of the passions. However, there is some evidence to the contrary. The description of a calm passion as being a ‘settled principle of action’ is very much in accord with the passage from ‘The Sceptic,’ and late in the discussion of the calm passions in Book Two of the *Treatise* Hume includes a section entitled ‘Of the Effects of Custom.’ Here he declares,

[N]othing has a greater effect both to encrease and diminish our passions... than custom and repetition... Hence every thing, that is new, is most affecting, and gives us either more pleasure and pain, than what, strictly speaking, naturally belongs to it. When it often returns upon us, the novelty wears off; the passions subside; the hurry of the spirit is over; and we survey objects with greater tranquillity. (T 2.3.5.1-2, 422-3)

Despite the closer association of custom<sup>101</sup> with the passions here, the implication remains that custom and habit are understood as distinct from the passions themselves: custom ‘encreases and diminishes’ the passions. At least some habits are therefore not to be cashed out in terms of calm passions, and it may be the case that none are.<sup>102</sup> Habits can be added to natural abilities and passions as being

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<sup>101</sup> And repetition, as Hume says here. Hume elides the distinction between custom as repetition and custom as *the effect of* repetition. In the passage just cited, he implies that ‘custom’ and ‘repetition’ are synonyms, but at T 1.3.8.10 (102) he says, “we call everything CUSTOM, which proceeds from a past repetition.” This failure of Hume’s deserves more thorough treatment than I have given it, but giving it adequate treatment would constitute too much of a digression from the main topic of this study.

<sup>102</sup> For an interesting discussion of habits, calm passions and character in an historical context see John P. Wright, “Butler and Hume on Habit and Moral Character,” in *Hume and Hume’s Connexions*, ed. Michael A. Stewart and John P. Wright (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). Wright’s view supports a strong link between the three, but leaves unanswered the question as to whether there may be habits that are not (strongly) related to the calm passions but yet are involved in character.

elements contributing to character, according to Hume. Further, there is nothing to suggest that Hume considers habits to be anything but real and enduring properties of persons. In order for habits to play the role they do in Hume's explanation of the origin of the idea of necessary connection, they must be more enduring than the individual instances of conjunction that we experience, and the passage from 'The Sceptic' indicates that habits can be involved in enduring character. Habits therefore fulfil the metaphysical condition. Again, it is not at present clear how people come to know about habits, but it is clear that Hume considers them to be a matter of common knowledge. Exactly how they can be common knowledge will be examined in Chapter Three.

## **Belief and General Rules**

In the previous section it was argued that beliefs are formed through habits, according to Hume. This is a partial account of Hume's theory of belief. While it is not the concern of this study to investigate Hume's theory of belief in general, a little more needs to be said, since certain types of beliefs might be elements of character.

One type of belief about which Hume has plenty to say in connection with character is religious belief. Of particular note is his interest in superstition and enthusiasm, which recurs throughout his work from the *Treatise* through to the posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. He devotes one of his early essays to the topic, in which he discusses the two as different species of false religion and on how they impact on various aspects of life, including the character of the person involved. However, there is nothing to attach these two things unequivocally to belief, as distinct from the passions. In 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' Hume lists the origins of the former as, "weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance," and the origins of the latter as, "hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance." (Essays 74) In both cases there is clear reference to some passions, but in neither case is there obvious reference to beliefs. 'Ignorance' appears in both lists, but it is difficult to tell exactly what this might mean. It could, perhaps, be included in the natural abilities, or the lack of

them. In any case, it doesn't fit easily into the category of belief.

From the full descriptions of the two, superstition seems more apt to fit the category of belief, while enthusiasm inclines more to the passions. On superstition Hume writes, "The mind of man is subject to certain unaccountable terrors and apprehensions... In such a state of mind, infinite unknown evils are dreaded from unknown agents; and where real objects of terror are wanting, the soul... finds imaginary ones." (Essays 73-74) It is far from being a stretch to read this as implying that a superstitious person has certain beliefs in infinite unknown evils, which beliefs affect both his self-image and his behaviour: "[H]e appears unworthy, in his own eyes, of approaching the divine presence, and naturally has recourse to any other person... Hence the origin of priests." (Essays 75) Yet while the superstitious person seems to be swayed by beliefs, it does not seem to be the beliefs themselves that are important to his character. Rather it is the way in which he forms beliefs, in combination with his weakness, fear, melancholy, and ignorance, that is of interest.

In contrast to the weakness and melancholy of the superstitious, the enthusiast is described as being of "a bold and confident disposition." (Essays 74) In the descriptions of the enthusiast that follow, Hume repeatedly uses words that call to mind violence of passion, rather than belief. He talks of the enthusiast being subject to "raptures, transports, and surprising flights of fancy," and of being subject to "frenzy." (Essays 74) Finally he says, "The fanatic consecrates himself, and bestows on his own person a sacred character, much superior to what forms and ceremonious institutions can confer on any other." (Essays 76) Such consecration and bestowing does not really confer a character on the person: the sacred character mentioned here is something that the enthusiast imagines himself to have, it is not something that is really contributing to his character.<sup>103</sup> The character of the

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<sup>103</sup> The same goes for Hume's occasional references to the sanctity of character or sacerdotal character of priests. In these cases, I submit, Hume is referring to what might be called 'pseudo-character'. The priest pretends, even perhaps to himself, that he has some kind of superior nature allowing him to approach the deity, but Hume clearly holds that this is false. Alternatively, in some contexts the mention made of sanctity of character seems to be merely shorthand for 'moral excellence', such as in *Dialogue 12*, "[W]hy may we not expect a superior sanctity of life, and

enthusiast is primarily identified in terms of passions and imagination (fancy), not in terms of his beliefs.

Nonetheless, there is some role for belief in character, which is in evidence in the description of the superstitious and the enthusiastic. In both cases, a fundamental, identifying characteristic of the person involved is the way in which they form beliefs. And in both cases, the way in which they form beliefs is hasty, precipitate and ignorant. To resolve this, Hume says, “there is nothing but philosophy,” (Essays 75) by which he means: more sophisticated and reasonable reflection on our beliefs.<sup>104</sup> Recognition of the importance of belief formation in these cases suggests that a different part of Hume’s philosophy may yield an element of character: his appeal to general rules.

### ***The Double Influence of General Rules***

Hume first introduces general rules during his discussion of causation in the *Treatise*. Hume’s account distinguishes between two different kinds of general rules. According to Thomas K. Hearn:

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greater benevolence and moderation, from persons who are set apart for religion, who are continually inculcating it upon others, and who must themselves imbibe a greater share of it?” (DNR 125)

<sup>104</sup> Strictly, this is only the way to combat superstition and not enthusiasm. Since enthusiasm is a matter of strong, violent passions, it involves “a contempt for the common rules of reason, morality, and prudence.” (Essays 77) Consequently, it would be vain to try to reason someone out of enthusiasm. Although he does not explicitly say so, it is in accord with Hume’s general project that someone who had developed more sophisticated means of belief formation would be resistant to enthusiasm, because they would be less inclined to let their passions run away with them. But even then, it is not a complete guard. See EHU 10.17; 117-18. Fortunately, according to Hume at least, enthusiasm provides its own solution: “[E]nthusiasm produces the most cruel disorders in human society; but its fury is like that of thunder and tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little time, and leave the air more calm and serene than before.” (Essays 77) The reason for this is that enthusiasts by their very nature “neglect all those outward ceremonies and observances,” (Essays 76) which are so central to the superstitious brand of religion. Having no such practices to maintain them, their passions decay. The relationship between character and social practices will be discussed at much greater length in Chapter Three.

One type of [general] rule describes a propensity of the imagination to extend the scope of judgments formed in one set of circumstances to other resembling but non-identical circumstances. The other type of general rule... functions to correct certain natural propensities which result in erroneous belief or action if permitted to operate unchecked.<sup>105</sup>

The first type of general rule (henceforth GR I) concerns our natural propensity to generalise about cases. Such generalisations proceed “from those very principles, on which all judgements concerning causes and effects depend.” (T 1.3.13.8; 147) In other words they proceed from custom and habit. They are therefore essential to the way our minds work, according to Hume. They can nonetheless be misleading:

In almost all kinds of causes there is a complication of circumstances, of which some are essential, and others superfluous... Now we may observe, that when these superfluous circumstances are numerous, and remarkable, and frequently conjoin'd with the essential, they have such an influence on the imagination, that even in the absence of the latter they carry us on to the conception of the usual effect. (T 1.3.13.9; 148)

In other words, say that A is essential for the production of C. That is to say, A is constantly conjoined with C. However, in all our experience thus far, A has been accompanied by B, even though they are not, in fact, constantly conjoined. We then form a rule that A and B are both essential for C. We may even, according to Hume, come to expect C when only B is present, despite the fact that it is, in fact, only accidentally present. So, for example, I may have seen cricket balls break windows several times in my life, and all cricket balls that I have seen have been red. If I then see a red ball flying towards a window, I expect the window to break, since my mind naturally associates red balls and broken windows. But in this new case the ball in question is an inflatable beach ball, which has virtually no mass, and hence will not break the window. I am mistaken, but the origin of my mistake is the exact means by which I learnt the correct judgement in the case of cricket balls, namely custom and habit.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas K. Hearn, Jr., “‘General Rules’ in Hume’s *Treatise*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 8 (1970): 405-406. My account is indebted to Hearn’s.

<sup>106</sup> I am taking constant conjunction to be a property of the world rather than a property of our minds.

One example Hume gives of GR I is racial prejudice. If all Irishmen that we have encountered in the past have been witless, we are inclined to believe that any new Irishman that we encounter will also be witless, however engaging he is in conversation. Indeed, such a belief may form itself so strongly in our minds that we endorse such a belief and conclude “that [he] must be [a] dunce... in spite of sense or reason.” (T 1.3.13.7; 146-47) This might be thought to be evidence for GR I being an element of character, since prejudice seems to be a prime candidate for a character trait, but this is not the case. Although prejudice is indeed important for character, on Hume’s account as well as generally, GR I are universal to human beings. All of us are prejudiced insofar as we are subject to GR I, but our interest in character is concerned with ways in which people differ from one another, which makes GR I at the very least uninteresting with regards to character, if not rules them out of consideration altogether. It is to the extent that we are capable of countering the influence of GR I that we are more or less prejudiced than others, which is when prejudice becomes a part of character.

How are GR I to be countered? The simplest answer would be just to ignore them, but this is not a possibility according to Hume. As already mentioned, GR I follow from the same principles as all our judgements concerning cause and effect. These principles are not ones over which we have any direct control:

Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge, as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sun-shine. (T 1.4.1.7; 183)

GR I are essential to the way our minds work, as such they are inescapable. A man suspended in a solid iron cage over a precipice “cannot forbear trembling... tho’ he knows himself to be perfectly secure from falling.” (T 1.3.13.10; 148) The idea of

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Strictly speaking, in this case cricket balls, red or otherwise, are not constantly conjoined with breaking windows. To give the example strict accuracy a more scientific formulation is required, such that objects of mass  $M \geq x$  moving at a velocity  $V \geq y$  striking a window (a strong but brittle flat object) with thickness  $T \leq z$ , etc. are constantly conjoined with the window breaking.



falling is so vivid in such circumstances that it impinges on the imagination despite the knowledge that he is secured by the strength of iron. This is surely an accurate observation for how many of us would feel; fear of heights is rarely completely dispelled through someone's assuring us that we are, in fact, safe.

Hume's solution is not to try to hold back, but to go further. GR I can only be corrected by a further application of general rules.

The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this... [We see] all philosophy ready to be subverted by a principle of human nature, and again sav'd by a new direction of the very same principle. (T 1.3.13.12; 150)<sup>107</sup>

This is the application of the second type of general rules (henceforth GR II).

GR II depend upon conscious reflection on the general propensity to expect the same effect from merely similar causes. By reflecting upon when our judgements according to GR I are correct and when they are incorrect we are able to form a set of rules by which to order and correct the first. Hume's suggestion that we are merely doing the same thing again is thus somewhat misleading. As Hearn points out, "The second sort of rules also have a reflective character; by which I mean that they are consciously formulated and adopted. They are not the result of mere propensities."<sup>108</sup>

The clearest examples of GR II are those given by Hume in T 1.3.15, 'Rules by which to Judge of Causes and Effects', but GR II occur also in his aesthetics and ethics, both of which will be examined in more detail later on (pp. 139, 177). For present purposes, I simply note that general rules are an important element of our minds, according to Hume, and that they are instrumental in terms of how we form beliefs, which links them back to superstition and enthusiasm. Both of the latter are said by Hume to depend upon ignorance. I submit that this ignorance is to be cashed out, at least in part, in terms of a lack of GR II. That is to say, the superstitious and

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<sup>107</sup> These sentences have been reversed in order.

<sup>108</sup> Hearn, "General Rules," 410.

the enthusiasts allow their minds to follow the propensities of the imagination, or fancy. In other words, they allow themselves to be swayed by GR I without attempting to counter them. When this leads to absurdities they do not attempt to reconcile their conflicting thoughts by re-examining the generalisations that led them to such absurdities, but instead they suppose “unknown agents,” who “are entirely invisible.” (Essays 73-74)

Whether beliefs themselves constitute one of the elements of character is moot. On the one hand, some beliefs are held for long periods of time, form the loci of some of our most enduring commitments (e.g. religious beliefs), and have an influence on our behaviour,<sup>109</sup> as such they seem to be prime candidates for elements of character. On the other hand, there is little direct evidence that Hume thought that this was the case. We have natural beliefs, as Kemp Smith called them, about cause and effect and the existence of the external world,<sup>110</sup> but these do not seem to be the kind of things that constitute character. The status of other beliefs, such as those of the superstitious, take a back seat compared to the formation of beliefs. It is the formation of superstitious beliefs that is central to the character of the superstitious, while the enthusiast is more readily accounted for in terms of his violent passions than his beliefs.

Before leaving the question of whether belief is an element of character, it is worth considering whether general rules of either type are elements of character in their own right. GR I appear to be as much instances of habit as anything else. It is owing to the influence of custom/habit upon the imagination that we are led to make hasty generalisations (T 1.3.13.8; 147). As such, GR I are perhaps already covered by the

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<sup>109</sup> This is obviously controversial, as Hume is often taken to claim that beliefs are completely inert when unaccompanied by a desire. I indicated my suspicions on this score in a footnote at the beginning of the chapter (p. 43, n. 62). For an explicit argument that belief can influence behaviour according to Hume, see Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 157-59 and *Death & Character*, 3-22. Criticism of Baier's argument in *A Progress of Sentiments* can be found in Rachel Cohon, “On an Unorthodox Account of Hume's Moral Psychology,” *Hume Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994), and David Owen, “Reason, Reflections, and Reductios,” *Hume Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994). Baier responds in her, “Response to My Critics,” *Hume Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>110</sup> Quoted above, p. 21.

discussion of habits above. How far we are swayed by GR I is a matter of how successfully we are able to counter them. This then suggests that GR II may be candidates for elements of character. But there is a difficult ambiguity in Hume's characterisation of GR II. On the one hand, they are invoked as a conscious and reflective means of reapplying general rules. This makes GR II into a kind of monitoring process. On the other hand, Hume's clearest examples of GR II, those 'by which to Judge of Causes and Effects', are phrased in such a way by Hume that they could easily be described as abstract beliefs about cause and effect. Take, for example, Rule Six: "The difference in the effects of two resembling objects must proceed from that particular, in which they differ." (T 1.3.15.8; 174) So the different effect of the red cricket ball from that of the red beach ball is explained through that particular in which they differ, their respective masses, rather than, say, by supposing that the laws of nature with respect to redness have changed. This makes GR II the *outcome* of a conscious and reflective consideration of GR I. Hume uses the phrase 'general rule' to refer to both the process itself and the belief that is the outcome of that process and he is apparently unaware of his equivocation on this point. Hume's insistence that GR II are of the same kind as GR I, allowing for the complication that they cannot be exactly the same, suggests that it is best to understand GR II as the process rather than the outcome.<sup>111</sup> If GR II are to be considered as elements of character it is under this interpretation that they are most likely to contribute.

Whether or not GR II understood in this way can constitute a distinct element of character is a similarly difficult question. GR II combine custom/habit and certain intellectual capacities. In other words, GR II are a combination of habits and natural abilities. We acquire habits of generalisation and then temper them with reflection. Insofar as GR II contribute to character they can be seen as a combination of other elements.

### ***Mixtures and Compounds***

A further question arises: what is the nature of this combination? To borrow a

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<sup>111</sup> I return to this question in Chapters Four and Five, pp. 139, 177.

metaphor from chemistry, do they form a mixture, in which each of the elements retains its own separate identity, or do they form a compound, in which they undergo a change and fuse into one new thing?<sup>112</sup> In the case of GR II, it may actually be a little of both. Our initial response is habitual, but it is transformed by our natural abilities (intellectual capacities) to form a new kind of thing: a practical skill. In one sense this is like a compound. Although it has some properties which make it similar to (blind) habit, it has other properties which make it more similar to a natural ability. But it is still understood to be a single, unified thing, rather than being habits and natural abilities working together. However, in another sense it is more like a mixture, since there is no suggestion that either the habits or the natural abilities cease to be operative once the skill has been developed. Although skills may be improved by general practice, they may, in some cases, continue to be improved, or impeded, by habits or reasoned reflection. In Hume's terms, GR I do not cease to influence us and our natural abilities for reasoned reflection remain.

As I will argue later, Hume has many different examples of elements being combined in character. Indeed, this is a large part of his portrait of the true judge, as given in 'Of the Standard of Taste', which will be the chief topic of Chapter Four. Similarly, I will argue in Chapter Five that the moral judge, while not so clearly drawn by Hume, is best reconstructed in similar terms. In all such cases the question may arise as to whether the individual elements are mixed or compounded and in many such cases the answer will be difficult, ambiguous or itself mixed. This should not, of itself, be surprising, particularly for anyone with more than a passing knowledge of Hume's theory of the passions. Throughout Book Two, Hume talks of passions being 'converted' or 'transformed' into one another, and at one stage observes,

When two passions are already present in the mind, they readily *mingle and unite*, tho' they have but one relation, and sometimes without any. The predominant passion *swallows up* the inferior, and *converts* it into itself. The spirits, when once excited, easily receive a *change in their direction*; and 'tis natural to imagine this

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<sup>112</sup> I owe this question to Ronald de Souza, who raised it in response to my paper, "The Sun or the Climate? Hume's Comments on Character," (paper presented to the 35<sup>th</sup> Hume Society Conference, Akureyri, Iceland, August 7-10, 2008).

change will come from the prevailing affection. (T 2.3.4.2; 420, my emphases)

Hume's discussion is laden with metaphor here, making it difficult to unpick what he means with any accuracy,<sup>113</sup> but the overall impression is of passions blending together to form one stronger passion. Passions at least are capable of forming compounds, where the original passion is no longer present.

In the next two sections T 2.3.5-6, Hume discusses the interaction between the passions and custom and the imagination. Here again, the impression is of passions being transformed through the exercise of the respective faculties to create something quite different. So, for example, when we experience something new the novelty of the experience augments the feeling that "naturally belongs to it." (T 2.3.5.2; 423) Over time custom operates on the passion we feel, with various different results. In some cases we acquire a taste for something through familiarity (T 2.3.5.3; 423). In others we may become so bored with something that would often excite us that we actually feel it as an irritation rather than a pleasure (T 2.3.5.4; 424). In T 2.3.6 the discussion revolves around the vivacity of our imagination and how a skilful orator may use his eloquence to "give force to... ideas." (T 2.3.6.7; 427)

The clearest answer Hume gives to whether different elements of the mind<sup>114</sup> combine in such a way as to form a compound or a mixture occurs earlier in Book Two, where he contrasts ideas and impressions:

Ideas may be compar'd to the extension and solidity of matter, and impressions, especially reflective ones, to colours, tastes, smells and other sensible qualities. Ideas never admit of a total union, but are endow'd with a kind of impenetrability, by which they exclude each other, and are capable of forming a compound by their conjunction, not by their mixture. On the other hand, impressions and passions are

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<sup>113</sup> What Hume might mean by some of these metaphors is discussed by Alex Neill, "'An Unaccountable Pleasure': Hume on Tragedy and the Passions," *Hume Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 344-47.

<sup>114</sup> There is no mention of character at this point, but since I have shown that certain passions, as well as other mental properties, are treated as elements of character by Hume, what he says at this point can be seen to apply to character.

susceptible of an entire union; and like colours, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself, and contribute only to vary that uniform impression, which arises from the whole. (T 2.2.6.1; 366)

Although Hume's terminology is confusingly at odds with the modern chemical terminology – his use of 'compound by their conjunction' is more similar to our 'mixture,' despite his declaration to the contrary, and his description of the passions being susceptible of an 'entire union' seems to be more akin to forming a compound – he could not be much clearer in his meaning here. It shows that Hume is open to the mind containing both compounds and mixtures, but with different elements combining in different ways.

## **Character as a 'Bundle'**

So far in this chapter it has been argued that McIntyre's position, which identifies character with the passions, is too restrictive. I have identified several different elements that can contribute to character for Hume, namely passions, natural abilities, habits and general rules. This list may not be exhaustive (beliefs, for example, might be added), but it is sufficiently detailed to proceed. I have also briefly considered how the different elements may combine to form mixtures and compounds. The picture of character that has been built up so far in this chapter suggests it is composed of heterogeneous elements. All of these are clearly thought of by Hume as real properties of persons and consequently they all fulfil the metaphysical condition. This condition has been assumed throughout, while only occasional reference has been made to the other two conditions. In the next chapter the assumption that the metaphysical condition is sound will be defended against criticism and it will be considered how my account can fulfil the epistemological and practical conditions. Before this chapter concludes, however, it is appropriate to observe that the confusing gamut of elements introduced in the foregoing is analogous to one of Hume's central ideas: that of the self as a bundle.

McIntyre's position has an elegance and simplicity to it, so does Bricke's. The identification of one thing and only one thing with Humean character makes the identification and ascription of character traits a relatively straightforward task, in

theory if not in practice. My suggestion that character is heterogeneous lacks any such simplicity. It may perhaps be thought that I am guilty of being an “unskilful naturalist” in my interpretation of Hume, in that I have “invent[ed] without scruple a new principle to every new phænomenon, instead of adapting it to the old.” (T 2.1.3.6-7; 282)

It is true that my position lacks the simplicity of McIntyre’s, but, as I have already shown, there is plenty of evidence that Hume regards things other than passions as contributing to character. Moreover there is a ready to hand concept in Hume’s philosophy that can serve as an analogy to my interpretation, that of a bundle, as invoked in Hume’s section concerning personal identity. I quote it here in full:

I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos’d. (T 1.4.6.4; 252-53)

The central message of Hume’s attack on the Cartesian notion of the self, as presented here, is that the mind lacks simplicity and identity. His description of the mind includes sensory perceptions, thoughts and ‘all our other senses and faculties,’ and a paragraph earlier, love and hatred (T 1.4.6.3; 252). These are all supposed by Hume to be perceptions, but they are certainly not all perceptions of the same kind.<sup>115</sup> Some are impressions and some are ideas. Of the impressions some are

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<sup>115</sup> The breadth of Hume’s use of the word ‘perception’ was noted earlier, p. 46.

impressions of sensation, others impressions of reflection. Although Hume does not mention it here there are presumably both direct and indirect impressions of reflection (passions) and we could easily add many other kinds of feelings and sentiments to the list, that may or may not be strictly passions (the exact taxonomy is, perhaps, a matter for grammarians). Hume's designating all these things 'perceptions' notwithstanding, the bundle is heterogeneous. Why not then suppose his conception of character to be similarly heterogeneous?

The elements that I am suggesting are included in character for Hume are not, or not obviously at least, all perceptions of any kind, even allowing for Hume's incredible latitude with that category. Habits are not a kind of perception;<sup>116</sup> much less are natural abilities. In the character 'bundle' we are required, on my interpretation, to allow certain things to be enduring properties of persons which are not perceptions. But even in the bundle passage, with its emphasis on perceptions, Hume invokes 'senses', 'faculties' and 'powers of the soul'. It is only an exclusive focus on Book One that could lead one to suppose that such talk is only a momentary slip of the pen. Early in Book Two we find Hume attributing a certain structure to the mind, independently of the actual perceptions it is experiencing:

Unless nature had given some original qualities to the mind, it cou'd never have any secondary ones; because in that case it wou'd have no foundation for action, nor cou'd ever begin to exert itself. Now these qualities, which we must consider as original, are such as are most inseparable from the soul, and can be resolv'd into no other. (T 2.1.3.3; 280)<sup>117</sup>

Shortly thereafter comes the first of many references, both in the *Treatise* and in later works, to "organs of the human mind." (T 2.1.5.6; 287) It is thus not at all at odds with Hume's complete project to suppose that there are elements of the mind that go beyond the perceptions, to which he appears to restrict it in T 1.4.6.

The mind is therefore a broader bundle than T 1.4.6 implies. It is perfectly

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<sup>116</sup> I am assuming here that my point that habits are not (exclusively) understood to be calm passions is justified.

<sup>117</sup> It is worthwhile to point out that this passage is found just four paragraphs before Hume refers to the 'unskilful naturalist.'



plausible, then, to suggest that character may also be seen as a bundle, in this broader sense. This account of character can be understood as a modification of Bricke's formula, such that  $\varphi$  is understood not as one single thing, but a set of properties  $\{\varphi_1, \varphi_2, \varphi_3, \dots\}$ . The formula in full then becomes  $(\exists \{\varphi_1, \varphi_2, \varphi_3, \dots\}) [\{\varphi_1, \varphi_2, \varphi_3, \dots\}_a \& (\forall_\chi) ([\{\varphi_1, \varphi_2, \varphi_3, \dots\}_\chi \& O_\chi] \rightarrow R_\chi)]$ . And though this goes against T 1.4.6 insofar as it allows some properties into the category of the mental that Hume there denies, or at least appears to, it remains true to what I have called the central message of that section. The picture of character built up in this chapter does nothing to suggest that it has '*simplicity* in it at one time,' or '*identity* in different.' On the contrary, the picture of character that has been built up so far is closer to being "a monstrous heap of principles." (T 2.1.3.6; 282) To describe character as a set of properties  $\{\varphi_1, \varphi_2, \varphi_3, \dots\}$  is just part of the story. Some explanation is required of how the separate elements come together to form something as enduring and apparently unified as character. For this explanation we need to turn to the social aspects of Hume's philosophy.

## Chapter Three

### Character and Social Context

The development of character as constituted by heterogeneous elements built up in Chapter Two showed McIntyre's reconstruction of Hume's conception of character as constituted by the passions alone to be too restricted. However, the picture left at the end of that chapter was of a 'monstrous heap of principles' rather than an enduring and unified character. In this chapter, I will examine Hume's social philosophy to show how the diverse elements of character can come together to form something like a unified and enduring whole. It will also be shown how appreciation of the social context in which character appears allows for the fulfilment of the epistemological and practical conditions. Before coming to this discussion, it is necessary to consider an objection, which, if it proved correct, would undermine the whole of Chapter Two. This objection concerns the condition that was taken to be central in Chapter Two and was there assumed to be correct: the metaphysical condition.

#### Costelloe and 'Surface Grammar'

Timothy Costelloe suggests that there is a common fallacy committed by those who have tried to reconstruct Hume's conception of character. The fallacy he identifies is uncomfortably similar to what I have called the metaphysical condition. His full statement of it runs as follows:

[The fallacy] appears in the commentaries of those who attribute to Hume the idea that 'character' is a psychological state or metaphysically conceived substance from which actions mysteriously flow or by which they are putatively caused. This attribution arises when the locutions Hume uses to describe character—'motives,' 'dispositions,' 'character traits,'<sup>118</sup> 'durable qualities,' and the like—are treated as

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<sup>118</sup> Hume never uses the word 'trait'. It does not appear in the *Treatise*, either of the *Enquiries*, the *Essays*, the *History*, the *Dialogues*, or the *Natural History*. This claim is based upon searching the e-texts available from Project Gutenberg (*Treatise*, *Enquiries*, *Dialogues*)

mental states either existing autonomously or somehow residing ‘in’ human beings. Once the latter conclusion has been drawn, it is quite natural to see Hume as a *realist* in his approach to character: that when he speaks of traits, dispositions, and the like, they ‘genuinely have a reference.’<sup>119</sup>

When characterising the metaphysical condition I claimed that Hume’s treatment of character as the cause of actions implies that he considers character to be a real feature of persons, but that this does not entail that character must be some kind of substance, whether physical or mental, since Hume repudiates the notion of substance altogether (p. 28). There is a disagreement here between Costelloe and myself. He claims that ‘seeing Hume as a *realist* in his approach to character’ entails that character must consist in some ‘metaphysically conceived substance’ ‘by which actions are putatively caused.’ I claimed in Chapter One that it was possible to endorse the metaphysical condition, i.e. to claim that character was a real property of persons, without being committed to (mental or physical) substances. Does Costelloe’s criticism hold water?

It is quite clear that Hume repudiates the notion of substance. However, it is worth examining closely what this repudiation involves. The chief ingredient in the conception of substance that falls under Hume’s attack is the idea of “something unknown and invisible, which [we suppose] to continue the same under all... variations; and this unintelligible something [we call] a *substance, or original and first matter*.” (T 1.4.3.4; 220) He goes on to claim that we “entertain a like notion with regard to the simplicity of substances.” (T 1.4.3.5; 221) The idea of substance that he repudiates in T 1.4.3, then, is very much the same as that which he repudiates in T 1.4.6, a single, simple entity which remains unchanged over time, therefore grounding identity. When he comes to section T 1.4.5, ‘Of the Immateriality of the Soul,’ he considers a different definition of substance, which

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<http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/h#a1440>, and the Online Library of Liberty (*Essays, History, Natural History*) [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=704](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=704). As an electronic search it is subject to problems owing to changes of spelling or mistypes in the e-texts.

<sup>119</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 398.

someone might raise in objection to his attack. This definition is: “substance is *something which may exist by itself*.” (T 1.4.5.5; 233) Hume retorts,

Shou’d this be said, I shou’d observe, that this definition agrees to every thing, that can possibly be conceiv’d... [S]ince all our perceptions are different from each other, and from every thing else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider’d as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence. *They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance.* (T 1.4.5.5; 233, emphasis mine)

Hume’s claims here are somewhat peculiar and difficult. How should we know that ‘all our perceptions are different from each other’? Or indeed that they are different ‘from everything else in the universe’? Nor is it immediately clear that all of our perceptions are distinct and separable. His final qualification that they are only substances as far as the definition goes should be emphasised, since Hume’s claim concerns the inadequacy of the definition. In the very next paragraph he insists, “A substance is entirely different from a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of a substance.” (T 1.4.5.6; 234) But leaving aside questions of this kind, Hume commits himself here to the idea that there can, in fact, be objects that exist ‘by themselves’. There is nothing in his claims against the realism of physical or mental entities; what Hume is denying is that we need some notion of the “immaterial substances, in which... our perceptions... inhere.” (T 1.4.5.2; 222) Or as he puts it later in the context of his analogy of the theatre in T 1.4.6, “nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented.” (T 1.4.6.4; 253)

The suggestion that perceptions have no need of a place, in which to reside, is pertinent, as in T 1.4.5 (‘Of the Immateriality of the Soul’) Hume delivers

a maxim, which is condemn’d by several metaphysicians, and is esteem’d contrary to the most certain principles of human reason. This maxim is *that an object may exist, and yet be no where*: And I assert, that this is not only possible, but that the greatest part of beings do and must exist after this manner. (T 1.4.5.10; 235)

Costelloe claims that this shows that it is “possible for traits of character to exist in a similar fashion, without resorting to speculative claims about their temporal and

spatial location.”<sup>120</sup> There are therefore “different *senses* of ‘existence’.”<sup>121</sup>

Provided we are careful to keep in mind which sense of existence we are using we are able to “talk of traits *existing*, or of people *having* characters, but we are in error if we draw from this everyday location any metaphysical conclusions about the substantial nature of character.” He goes on:

Yet this is precisely what Hume would be committed to if he held the metaphysical view of *character*. He would be subject to the fallacy of taking character as separate and different in kind from the activities that compose it, even though, on closer investigation, it is impossible to identify anything that could be the source of the relevant impression.<sup>122</sup>

Those who subscribe to the ‘metaphysical view’ are guilty of “a reluctance to go beyond the surface grammar Hume employs, and tend to transform uncritically ordinary turns of phrase into names for ‘real’ entities of one sort or another.”<sup>123</sup>

Costelloe includes a number of rather different accounts of Hume on character under the title of the metaphysical view. Penelhum and Dees are mentioned, Johnson is criticised at a little more length, and Bricke is supposed to represent the “extreme form” in his “unwarranted reductionism” of character to “physiological states of the brain.”<sup>124</sup> While some of these are perhaps guilty of the kind of fallacy

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<sup>120</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 399. Costelloe has extended Hume’s maxim here. Hume never denies temporal location to things that exist in this manner, indeed it is essential to one of his arguments that they do have temporal location. The maxim that denies a spatial location incorporates “all our perceptions and objects, except those of sight and feeling [touch].” He goes on, “A moral reflection cannot be plac’d on the right or left hand of a passion, nor can a smell or sound be either of a circular or a square figure.” (T 1.4.5.10; 236) But Hume surely does not mean to deny that passions or smells occur at a particular time. He later discusses the “illusion” which leads us to suppose that the bitter and sweet tastes “lie in the very visible body” of the olive or the fig, when they are placed at opposite ends of a table, suggesting that we are led into the illusion by the fact that the sensation of biting into the fruit and its taste are “co-temporary in their appearance in the mind.” (T 1.4.5.11-12; 236-37)

<sup>121</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 57.

<sup>123</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 399.

<sup>124</sup> Costelloe’s criticisms appear in both “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 399-400, and *Aesthetics*

that Costelloe insists upon, he is rather unfair to others. Johnson, for example, explicitly makes metaphysical claims connecting character to substance, such as when he claims, “Hume’s general position is that virtuousness, as a moral character trait... inheres in a person as the quality redness (say) inheres in a substance.”<sup>125</sup> The absurdity of Johnson’s view, as an interpretation of Hume, is apparent and Costelloe’s criticisms of him are well made. Dees, however, declares himself not to be “concerned... with the ontological status of character traits,” deferring on such issues to McIntyre’s account,<sup>126</sup> so Costelloe’s picking up on one or two metaphysical remarks is a little unfair. As to Bricke, he has already received substantial discussion in Chapters One and Two. Here it will suffice to say that Costelloe’s representation of Bricke’s position as being the ‘extreme form’ of the metaphysical view is unjustified, especially when placed in contrast to Johnson’s. It is apparent that what Costelloe calls the ‘metaphysical view’ is not a single view; if the term has any purchase at all it indicates a collection of views united together in the supposition that Hume took ‘character as separate and different in kind from the activities that compose it’.

Costelloe attributes more or less the same mistake to McIntyre. He discusses her view at considerable length, but ultimately concludes that despite her attempt to “reconcile the two contradictory positions,” those of Hume’s scepticism about the self in T 1.4.6 and his commitment to a durable character, she “ultimately falls prey to the very metaphysical reasoning that Hume otherwise rejects.”<sup>127</sup> What the exact mistake she has made in doing so is not made quite clear in either of Costelloe’s accounts. The chief mistake, however, seems to be the assumption that “Hume is a *realist* about character,” which leads McIntyre “to search his work for an alternative to the metaphysical concept of substance that can accommodate the (purportedly)

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*and Morals*, 58-59.

<sup>125</sup> Johnson, “Hume on Character,” 159.

<sup>126</sup> Richard H. Dees, “Hume on the Characters of Virtue,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (1997): 47n.

<sup>127</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 60-61. The latter phrase also appears in “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 403.

realist language of stable dispositions and enduring traits.”<sup>128</sup> This is a different mistake from that identified above as typical of the metaphysical view, as McIntyre is appealing to an *alternative* to substance, but if this is the sin which Costelloe is accusing McIntyre of committing then I also must be guilty, and guilty many times over.

## The ‘Practical View’

The negative part of Costelloe’s discussion, his criticisms of Penelhum, Dees, Johnson, Bricke, and McIntyre, has been analysed above, but the exact objection that he is levelling is still somewhat unclear. To get clear on exactly what he thinks is wrong with reading Hume as a realist about character it is necessary to examine what he offers as an alternative. He calls his positive account the “practical view.”<sup>129</sup>

His approach to the practical view is through Hume’s account of beauty, “and, in particular, the doctrine derived from Locke that beauty and deformity are comparable to secondary qualities.”<sup>130</sup> This area of Hume’s philosophy is, he says, the “one area where commentators are unanimous in not seeing Hume as a realist.”<sup>131</sup> The view of beauty, to which Costelloe is referring, is clearly present in Hume’s philosophy, both in the *Treatise* and in some of the *Essays*, obviously so in ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ and especially in the following passage from ‘The Sceptic’:

EUCLID has fully explained every quality of the circle, but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. Beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line *whose* parts are all equally

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<sup>128</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 397.

<sup>130</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 404. Hume’s position is actually based on a misunderstanding of Locke, who held that secondary qualities were *powers* of objects to produce sensations in us. See Locke, *Essay*, 2.8.10.

<sup>131</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 61.

distant from a common centre. It is only the effect which that figure produces upon a mind, whose particular fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments. (Essays 165 & EPM App. 1.14; 291-92)<sup>132</sup>

Of course, as Hume notes, we are prone to being mistaken as to where beauty lies. The common locution, ‘X is beautiful,’ leads us to treat beauty as though it is a property of objects. However, “a careful eye” (Essays 233) discovers the error and correctly identifies beauty as being a sentiment in an observer, rather than a property of an object itself. Consequently, according to Costelloe, Hume holds that beauty is akin to a secondary quality.

Here, however, we should have pause, because Hume is sceptical about the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. He devotes an entire section (T 1.4.4 ‘Of the Modern Philosophy’) of the *Treatise* to undermining the distinction. It is thus strange to find Hume deploying what appears to be just such a distinction later in the *Treatise* and in the *Essays*. Simon Blackburn, in a discussion of this point, albeit more focused on virtue and vice than beauty, suggests that once Hume has returned from dining and playing backgammon “to the newly sober inquiry into the principles of moral good and evil... [he] knows himself at this point to be embarked on an inquiry that can only have strained relations with the deep reflections of Book I.”<sup>133</sup> Blackburn suggests that Hume’s references to the distinction between primary and secondary qualities later in his work are always made with distaste and mere toleration, rather than wholehearted commitment.<sup>134</sup> They are used expediently and Hume tends immediately to take back what he has granted, by referring to the distinction as having “little or no influence on practice,” (T 3.1.1.26; 469) or taking “off no more from the reality of the [secondary] qualities, than from that of the [primary].” (Essays 166n)

John Corvino takes issue with Blackburn. Central to Corvino’s argument is that when Hume raises the topic of primary and secondary qualities in relation to

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<sup>132</sup> See also T 2.1.8.6; 301 and Essays 235.

<sup>133</sup> Blackburn, “Mezzanine Level,” 282.

<sup>134</sup> Blackburn, “Mezzanine Level,” 274.



morality and aesthetics he is “raising an analogy.” This does not require that Hume is committed to the view that “moral qualities *are* secondary qualities. He may simply wish to point out some important similarities for the purposes of illustrating his position.”<sup>135</sup> But it equally does not require Hume to be as sceptical about the primary/secondary quality distinction when he brings it up in the context of ethics and aesthetics as he is about it in Book One of the *Treatise*. In the course of his use of the analogy, Hume revisits “the analogy in various places; he uses it consistently to underscore points about how moral (and aesthetic) qualities, while perceiver-dependent, can nonetheless provide grounds for truth-evaluable claims.”<sup>136</sup> Crucially, Corvino’s argument against Blackburn is that Hume picks up the primary and secondary quality analogy, without the distaste that Blackburn emphasises, in his aesthetics, and specifically in ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, which is the key battleground as far as Costelloe is concerned.<sup>137</sup>

Costelloe does not mention the ambiguous relationship Hume has with the primary/secondary qualities distinction. He proceeds to argue unperturbed that character can be understood as being a secondary quality like beauty and one that we mistakenly take to be a ‘real’ property of agents. “[A]s individuals commit the ‘error’ of taking beauty as a quality in the object, so they assign ‘character traits’ to this or that person *as if* they were qualities that inhered in persons (or brains).”<sup>138</sup> The argument for this relies upon a structural similarity between Hume’s accounts of “beauty, vacuum, power, and necessity,” which “all *appear* to have real

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<sup>135</sup> John Corvino, “Hume and the Second-Quality Analogy,” *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2008): 159.

<sup>136</sup> Corvino, “Second-Quality Analogy,” 170.

<sup>137</sup> It would be too much of a digression here to get embroiled in this debate, but I am unable to resist observing that Corvino’s argument relies upon a passage in ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ in which Hume does not appear to be speaking in his own voice. The passage is lengthy and is found at Essays 230. Corvino omits the opening line of the paragraph in which Hume writes, “There is a species of philosophy, which...” and in the next sentence, “The difference, it is said...” (Essays 229) The following paragraph begins, “But though this axiom, by passing into a proverb, seems to have attained the sanction of common sense...” (Essays 230) These expressions appear to express exactly the distaste which Blackburn finds elsewhere.

<sup>138</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 64-65. See also his “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 405.

referents.” This structural similarity, Costelloe suggests, can be extended to Hume’s account of character:

Precisely the same logic applies to Hume’s thinking about character and the ‘traits,’ which, in the metaphysical view, are treated as mysterious entities or ‘somethings.’ Like beauty in nature and art, that is, ‘traits’ are not qualities that inhere in ‘substance,’ ‘passions,’ or some conceptual equivalent, but are *sentiments to which certain actions give rise*.<sup>139</sup>

To support his claim that the accounts are structurally similar Costelloe relies on a famous passage from the *Treatise*, in which Hume apparently denies the reality of virtue and vice:

Take any action allow’d to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflection into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but ’tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. (T 3.1.1.26, 469)

Despite Hume’s claim that vice and virtue ‘lie in yourself, not in the object’ this passage is far from unequivocal support for Costelloe’s view. Particularly, the passage is perfectly compatible with David Norton’s suggestion that Hume “believes virtue and vice have a basis in aspects of reality that are quite independent of the mind of the person who pronounces the actions or characters to be virtuous or vicious.”<sup>140</sup> The point being that a line can be drawn between the character trait, which is a property of the agent involved, and what makes it vicious, which is a matter of the sentiments of observers. Here Hume is clearly criticising the

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<sup>139</sup> Costelloe, “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 405.

<sup>140</sup> Norton, *David Hume*, 113. Costelloe criticises Norton on this point in his “Beauty, Morals, and Character,” 403 and *Aesthetics and Morals*, 61. See also Árdal, *Passion and Value*, 208, who writes, “Hume is not suggesting that ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ are names for qualities that appear to belong to external objects (people), but that they really are in the mind of the observer. *Too great an emphasis on the analogy with secondary qualities* may lead one to believe this.” (Emphasis mine.)

rationalist conception of morality, whereby the moral property would have to be discoverable in the agent alone. A quality of character, such as a disposition to behave out of self-interest, could be discovered independently of such a disposition being considered vicious. As a *matter of fact* we do often consider self-interested behaviour to be vicious, but this is down to our particular natures, not down to a fact about the universe existing independently of the sentiments that human beings experience.

Hume's own example of this is the case of the sapling, "which springing up by degrees, at last overtops and destroys the parent tree: I ask, if in this instance there be wanting any relation, which is discoverable in parricide and ingratitude?" (T 3.1.1.24; 467) He goes on to consider a similar contrast with animals, "I wou'd fain ask any one, why incest in the human species is criminal, and why the very same action, and the same relations in animals have not the smallest moral turpitude and deformity?" He denies that the answer can be given that animals do not have a faculty of reason and hence cannot come to realise that incest is wrong, "for before reason can discover this turpitude, the turpitude must exist." Moreover, if it were inherent in nature that incest was wrong then animals would still be guilty of it: "Their want of a sufficient degree of reason may hinder them from perceiving the duties and obligations of morality, but [could] never hinder these duties from existing." (T 3.1.1.25; 467-68) In neither example does Hume deny that there are real properties of the trees or animals he is considering that are *causally* responsible for them behaving in the way that they do. Indeed, he considers that someone may respond to the sapling case by insisting that there is a different relation between the cause of the sapling's 'action' and its effect than there is in the human case, since in the human case the cause is "a choice or will." But Hume denies that this changes the relation:

'Tis a will or choice, that determines a man to kill his parent; and they are laws of matter and motion, that determine a sapling to destroy the oak, from which it sprung. Here then the same relations have different causes; but still the relations are the same. (T 3.1.1.24; 467)

There is no denial here of the reality of will, as the cause of the action, even though Hume may be deemed more sceptical of its reality than he is of character. There is

no reason to suppose that Hume should any more deny the reality of character as the cause of the action. His claim that ‘vice and virtue lie in yourself, not in the object’ denies that there is something intrinsically vicious about the character, considered merely in itself, which could be discovered by reason, such as the discovery of the relation of ingratitude or incest, but character as the *object* of judgement is assumed in Hume’s very phrasing.<sup>141</sup>

What of Costelloe’s appropriation of Hume’s maxim that ‘an object may exist, and yet be no where’? His idea is that character is not something separate from actions, but is merely a practical construct from these actions. “It might seem as if ‘character’ consisted of traits or sensible properties residing in persons themselves but, as with the beauty of the circle..., it is actually a phenomenon (to use Blackburn’s term) ‘constructed’ from occasions of practical action.”<sup>142</sup> Consequently, it has neither spatial nor temporal location. But this does not prevent our using it in a practical context. “Character can be discussed, praised, condemned, and the like, but these possibilities do not require of their referent that it be located in time and space like an object with ‘real’ existence.”<sup>143</sup>

Costelloe’s practical view relies on a conception of character that denies its reality as a property of the person to whom it is attributed. Instead, he recommends it as a practical concept, which can be useful to us in the context of practices such as

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<sup>141</sup> Baier makes the same point with reference to a different passage of Hume’s, see *A Progress of Sentiments*, 94-95.

<sup>142</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 66. The reference to Blackburn is to a comment in his ‘Hume on the Mezzanine Level’ that character “is a construct from occasions of action, thoughts about likely motivation, efforts at discounting for personal involvement with the subject, and so on.” See Blackburn, “Mezzanine Level,” 275. Costelloe’s attempts to adopt Blackburn as an ally here are highly suspect. First, as discussed above, Blackburn is sceptical of any attempt to interpret Hume’s ethics in terms of secondary qualities. Second, Blackburn proceeds, “In modern terms we might say it [character] is a theoretical entity, or possibly a logical construct.” There is too little in Blackburn’s account to say with confidence what he would consider character to be, although in conversation with me he suggested that he would see character as being a real property of a person onto which values are then projected, making his view on this point similar to Norton’s and Baier’s.

<sup>143</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 65.

praising and blaming, but which should not be reified into something with a spatial and temporal location. It should not be seen as a substance or anything like a substance. Costelloe thus rejects the metaphysical condition. But his rejection of this condition is ultimately unsatisfactory, as there are some aspects of Hume's conception of character for which Costelloe is unable to satisfactorily account. There are some aspects of Hume's conception of character that are inescapably realist.

### ***Character and Judgement***

Indications of the way in which character is inescapably realist can be found in Costelloe's own work. The first indication comes when he introduces beauty as an analogy for character. There he says, "[B]eauty is not a quality that resides in objects at all, but a feeling in an individual who is *fitted and appropriately educated* to experience the sentiment in question."<sup>144</sup> How are we supposed to cash out the phrase 'fitted and appropriately educated' if not by referring to some real property of the individual in question? This does not on its own imply anything about character, but later, when answering the possible objection that his interpretation is a "purely third-person account" in which the individual concerned "has no influence or control over... the 'figure' he or she 'makes in the world' (T 3.3.4.1[; 607])," Costelloe declares that "the practical view does not deny that people can and do reflect upon their conduct and correct mistakes made on previous occasions. Good character must be earned, and this involves some *soul-craft* where flaws are discovered and efforts taken to mend them."<sup>145</sup> Surely 'soul-craft' is only a possibility if there is such a thing as a 'soul', understood in some sense that renders it independent of being simply a sentiment arising in the observer of actions.

In *Aesthetics and Morals* the problem becomes more apparent:

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<sup>144</sup> Costelloe, "Beauty, Morals, and Character," 404 (second emphasis mine). This phrase is dropped from *Aesthetics and Morals*, in which the chapter on character is often copied *ad verbatim* from the earlier paper.

<sup>145</sup> Costelloe, "Beauty, Morals, and Character," 409. A similar paragraph is found in his *Aesthetics and Morals*, 70.

[W]ithin the class of operative moral concepts, there must be public criteria for judging a person's conduct in terms of an *appropriate* category. This means no more than that a competent agent is familiar with the concepts in question and is *capable of employing them correctly on any given occasion*. People can contravene these standards and employ a category *inappropriately*, but doing so systematically *constitutes conduct itself in need of explanation*. Calling somebody selfish, for example, when their conduct does not give sufficient grounds for doing so, might be *a moral failure on the part of the judge*, and baseless attributions of moral categories to slight another become an occasion for moral disapprobation.<sup>146</sup>

The focus of this passage has shifted from the individual performing the action to the spectator, to the judge. However, Costelloe has failed to appreciate just how important judges are in Hume's moral and aesthetical philosophy. Costelloe's description of the appropriate attribution of moral categories as requiring 'no more' than familiarity with these concepts and the capability of employing them correctly oversimplifies the situation. Hume devotes considerable space, although not enough, to describing exactly what this capability involves. His discussion focuses on the relevant capacities of the judge. To put it another way, it is a function of the judge's *character*. The malicious or spiteful judge, who deliberately and systematically describes someone as selfish when their conduct does not give sufficient grounds for such an attribution,<sup>147</sup> does indeed engage in conduct that is itself in need of explanation, but this is precisely where Costelloe is incapable of giving an explanation. All he can do is postulate another judge, who attributes malice or spite to the first, but then there is no reason for explanation to stop there. How do we know that the second judge is not just being malicious or spiteful? The moral failure of the judge must be given sufficient grounds, as well as the moral status of the individual performing the action.

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<sup>146</sup> Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 66-67 (second, fourth and fifth emphases mine). A shorter discussion of the same point is made in his "Beauty, Morals, and Character," 407.

<sup>147</sup> By hypothesis the judge in this case is not privy to any peculiar or secret knowledge of the individual involved of which others are not, or could not be (made), aware. It is obviously conceivable that a judge may be *thought* by others to be malicious or spiteful because the evidence that *they* have is not sufficient for the attribution, but the judge may have a long history with the individual concerned and may be privy to certain knowledge that justifies his verdict, but which cannot be communicated satisfactorily to others.

Costelloe's denial of the metaphysical condition fails. Hume's account of character contains some inescapably realist elements. These are, as I argued in Chapter Two, apparent throughout his philosophy. Costelloe dismissed such elements as a failure to see 'beyond the surface grammar Hume employs', but the requirement to explain the character of the judge cannot be met by Costelloe's account and if realist elements must be introduced to account for the character of the judge there is no reason to exclude them from other aspects of Hume's conception of character. In Chapters Four and Five I will discuss the properties of Hume's judges in detail, considering first the true judge in the case of aesthetics and then the judge of morals. I will argue that the character of the judge is not merely a topic that Hume discusses, but also a topic of paramount importance to his philosophy, perhaps even of greater importance than that of the character of individuals who are being judged.<sup>148</sup> However, such detailed discussion is, at present, postponed, for there is another pressing issue, that of explaining how the disparate elements identified in Chapter Two can come together to form a whole character. Costelloe's emphasis on the practical indicates the way forward here: character must be placed within a practical, social context for a full explanation.

## Knowledge of Character

At the end of the last chapter I noted that my approach led to a conception of character involving heterogeneous elements. This approach lacks the elegant simplicity of McIntyre's account and that of Bricke's. It risks the accusation that, assuming my interpretation is correct, Hume would fall foul of his own criticisms of the 'unskilful naturalist'. My approach, it might be complained, reduces Hume's conception of character to 'a monstrous heap of principles' (p. 81). In this case character may lose any practical utility. On McIntyre's account ascription of a

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<sup>148</sup> There are many respects in which Hume's moral philosophy can be described as purely descriptive of the moral norms of his society at the time; his account is sometimes criticised on this point for lacking sufficient normative force. Such normative force as there is in Hume's morals comes from his invocation of the "*general* points of view" (T 3.3.1.15; 581-82). I will argue in Chapter Five that this point of view is to be justified in terms of character. This suggests that normative force in Hume's philosophy may come from the character of the moral judge, although I will not argue this point directly.

character trait to someone is a matter of ascertaining whether or not they have a particular passion. On Bricke's account ascription of a character trait would perhaps be problematic for anyone bar the neuroscientist, but there is at least a clear indication of the method by which a character trait may be assigned. What might the equivalent be for my account? Is it necessary to analyse every individual trait in order to ascertain exactly which elements are involved? If this is the case, perhaps it would be preferable to take a revisionary approach to Hume's account and discount all the elements except the passions? Or maybe it just shows that Hume's account is too unwieldy and poorly conceived to be considered interesting?

Another way to put these problems is in terms of the conditions I outlined in Chapter One. The list of elements produced in Chapter Two were all satisfactory with regards to the metaphysical condition, but, except in the case of the passions, little or nothing was said about how the other two conditions might be satisfied. It is necessary to explain how we may come to know about character, both in terms of the epistemological condition and the practical condition. It must be explained both how it is possible to know characters and how ordinary people do actually have knowledge of characters. In the remainder of this chapter I will argue that such conditions can be met once character is seen within its social context. In such context character can be discovered by methods available to ordinary people, but the complexities of such discoveries are sometimes such that mistakes are made. Full knowledge of character is ultimately available most clearly when viewed from a distance, ideally through the study of history.<sup>149</sup>

I do not aim here to give an exhaustive account of Hume's social or historical philosophy, both of which are vastly complex.<sup>150</sup> What I will give is a discussion of some of the character sketches given by Hume, particularly the sketch of the character of soldiers given in 'Of National Characters' and the sketch of Charles I

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<sup>149</sup> The particular points of view from which character is best judged will be a central topic of Chapter Five.

<sup>150</sup> My account in the rest of this chapter has been influenced by Baier, who offers sophisticated accounts of the social context in which character is formed in both "Heaps and Bundles" and *A Progress of Sentiments*, but while it has been influenced by Baier's, my account is distinct from hers.



given in the *History of England*. These character sketches involve complex descriptions which connect various aspects of characters together and relate them to the life of the person whose character is under discussion. This highlights the socially integrated nature of character for Hume. Having set this general background for character attribution, I will examine the way in which character is revealed through social conventions.

One of the features of this account that will become clearer as I proceed is that the question of knowledge of character comes apart from the question of knowledge of the elements that constitute it. It is possible for someone to have knowledge of character without having any (exact) knowledge of the elements of character at work in a particular person. But this does not render the elements unimportant. “An anatomist... is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter; and ’tis even impracticable to excel in the latter art, without the assistance of the former.” (T 3.3.6.6; 621) Discovery of individual elements is sometimes of importance, such is the specialised work of the anatomist, but the actual practice of morality is more like the work of the painter, who perceives the whole rather than the minute parts.<sup>151</sup> This, in turn, provides an explanation of how there can be a reasonable gap between the practical and epistemological conditions. The practical condition can be met by general knowledge of character in social context, but since such knowledge falls short of knowledge of the actual elements there are hidden causes at work. In some situations the practical knowledge will prove insufficient.<sup>152</sup>

### ***Hume’s Character Sketches***

It has already been observed, in a footnote to p. 82 (n. 118), that Hume never uses

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<sup>151</sup> Hume sometimes implies that the painter’s job is easy, at least in the *First Enquiry* where the painter is associated with the “easy and obvious” style of philosophy and the anatomist with the “accurate and abstruse” (EHU 1.3; 6-7), but the suggestion that it is impossible to *excel* as a painter without some knowledge of anatomy shows that he does consider the painter’s task to have some difficulty to it.

<sup>152</sup> At risk of overloading the discussion with analogies, it is worth comparing this with the example of the stopped watch. See above, p. 31.

the word ‘trait’ in any of his works. There is a banal, but historically pertinent, explanation of this, in that the use of ‘trait’ in relation to character did not appear until the middle of the eighteenth-century and was therefore uncommon, if not unavailable, when Hume was writing.<sup>153</sup> But whether or not the word in this sense was in Hume’s vocabulary there is good reason to suppose he just didn’t see character as being a composite of traits at all. Whenever Hume sketches a character, which he does often in his *History* and in several places in his *Essays*, the overall impression he gives is of multiple aspects of character which interpenetrate and are thoroughly integrated into their possessor’s life. To put it another way, there is no suggestion that individual character traits can be isolated and then identified with what I have called elements. Character is treated by Hume in a more holistic fashion.

As an example of such a character, consider the general sketch he gives of the character of soldiers in ‘Of National Characters’:

The uncertainty of their life makes soldiers lavish and generous, as well as brave: Their idleness, together with the large societies they form in camps and garrisons, inclines them to pleasure and gallantry: By their frequent change of company, they acquire good breeding and an openness of behaviour: Being employed only against a public and an open enemy, they become candid, honest, and undesigning: And as they use more the labour of the body than that of the mind, they are commonly thoughtless and ignorant. (Essays 199)

The account of the character of soldiers given here includes reference to various different aspects of their characters that it is tempting to describe as traits; Hume uses descriptive terms that are often used to pick out “character-trait-names.”<sup>154</sup> But none of the character-trait-names used by Hume are used in isolation. There is no suggestion that the bravery characteristic of soldiers can be exclusively identified with any particular passion or set of passions, although Hume may be inclined to talk in this way in his more strictly philosophical passages. Nor is their ‘good breeding’ necessarily to be identified with particular natural abilities.

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<sup>153</sup> *OED*, ‘trait, n., 6.’ This sense of ‘trait’ does not appear in Johnson’s *Dictionary*.

<sup>154</sup> Brandt, “Traits of Character,” 23. This term was explained in Chapter Two (p. 59).

Throughout the character Hume gives of soldiers he refers to the kinds of society in which they find themselves. Why are soldiers given to ‘pleasure and gallantry’? They are given to such because it suits the form of life that finds them living in ‘camps and garrisons’. Why is the soldier ‘candid, honest, and undesigning’ rather than duplicitous, guileful, and hypocritical? It is because duplicity, guile and hypocrisy are useless to them: soldiers are ‘employed only against a public and open enemy’.<sup>155</sup> This comes out strongly in a footnote shortly after this portrait of the soldier, where Hume considers the priest. Priests, or at least most of them, are said to

feign more devotion than they are... possessed of... in order to... promote the spirit of superstition, by a continued grimace and hypocrisy. This dissimulation often destroys the candor and ingenuity of their temper, and makes an irreparable breach in their character. (Essays 199n-200n)<sup>156</sup>

It is precisely because of their requirement to maintain an appearance of “sanctity of character” (Essays 619b)<sup>157</sup> that they find hypocrisy and dissimulation useful to the point of virtual necessity. The point is summarised succinctly by Hume’s observation that the character of the priest “is, in most points, opposite to that of a soldier; *as is the way of life, from which it is derived.*” (Essays 199, emphasis mine)

The focus in these character sketches is more upon the formation of character than its discovery, but, as will become clear, the two are interconnected. It is through the relative stability of conditions that society offers us that we are able to prosecute our projects and it is through the way in which such long-term projects are realised that character is most clearly revealed. Even the soldier’s life, which Hume characterises as being constituted by frequent changes and upheavals, has a kind of regularity to it. The soldier is frequently asked to uproot and move to a different camp, which

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<sup>155</sup> It is necessary to restrict Hume’s character sketch to the eighteenth-century soldier, when warfare was conducted on battlefields in bright colours. Modern warfare, which involves the use of camouflage and guerrilla tactics, will have a different effect on the character of the soldier. Hume makes a similar point contrasting eighteenth-century soldiers to Greek soldiers in terms of politeness in a footnote to the character sketch (Essays 199n).

<sup>156</sup> A very similar argument is given by Philo in *Dialogue 12* (DNR 124).

<sup>157</sup> The full passage is quoted above, p. 3.

changes the company he keeps, but it is the very regularity of such movements that make the soldier gallant and open.<sup>158</sup>

The character sketches drawn by Hume in his *History* are more complex and it is more difficult to connect them so clearly to the way in which the person lived. Such indication is primarily given by the context in which they are placed: they appear at the end of the period of history in which the person is a prominent figure. The connection between the complexities of their life and their character is similar to the connection between the premises of an argument and its conclusion. The character sketch is justified by the account of their life that precedes it.

The most notorious of Hume's character sketches, that which resulted in his being "assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation" (Essays xxxvii), is the one he gives of Charles I.<sup>159</sup> It deserves to be quoted in full.

The character of this prince, as that of most men, if not all men, was mixed; but his virtues predominated extremely above his vices, or, more properly speaking, his imperfections: For scarce any of his faults rose to that pitch as to merit the appellation of vices. To consider him in the most favourable light, it may be affirmed, that his dignity was free from pride, his humanity from weakness, his bravery from rashness, his temperance from austerity, his frugality from avarice: All these virtues, in him, maintained their proper bounds, and merited unreserved praise. To speak most harshly of him, we may affirm, that many of his good qualities were attended with some latent frailty, which, though seeming inconsiderable, was able, when seconded by the extreme malevolence of his fortune, to disappoint them of all their influence: His beneficent disposition was clouded by a manner not very gracious; his virtue was tinctured with superstition;

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<sup>158</sup> Compare this to the account Hume gives in T 1.4.6 of the identity of a river, which is "in less than four and twenty hours... totally alter'd" in the parts (water etc.) that make it up, but retains its identity as the same river "during several ages" because it is "natural and essential" for rivers to be "changeable and inconstant" (T 1.4.6.14; 258).

<sup>159</sup> Of course, the 'cry of reproach' was against the first volume of the *History* as a whole, not merely the character sketch, but since the character sketch constitutes a summary of Hume's "generous tear for the fate of Charles I" (Essays xxxvii) it can be seen as the locus of the 'detestation' with which the book was received.

his good sense was disfigured by a deference to persons of a capacity inferior to his own; and his moderate temper exempted him not from hasty and precipitate resolutions. (H 5:542)

This character sketch concludes nearly 400 pages spent discussing the events of Charles' life. It is notable that every attribution of what might be supposed a trait to Charles comes in a manner which emphasises the mixed nature of the character that Hume attributes to him. Hume describes his virtues as 'predominating' over his vices, such that various virtues are 'free from' the kinds of vices with which they might be closely associated. The complexities of the character sketch become even clearer with regard to the 'imperfections' which 'attended' so many of his 'good qualities.' These imperfections 'cloud', 'tincture', and 'disfigure' those good qualities to which he could lay claim.

Such epithets as 'cloud', 'tincture', and 'disfigure' are resistant to attempts to isolate their two objects: it is the very description of Charles' 'beneficent disposition' as clouded by his lacking a gracious manner that tells us Hume's opinion of him. It is not that Charles possesses a 'beneficent disposition' and a 'manner not very gracious' but that they stand in a particular relation to one another, that of the latter clouding the former. There is no reason to suppose that we can appreciate what Charles' 'beneficent disposition' would have been like if it had not been so clouded, as it is a detail of his disposition that it was so clouded.<sup>160</sup>

The historical treatment Hume gives to characters such as Charles I's, and the prominence of character sketches in the *History* indicates the way in which character is revealed through ongoing projects and the way in which such projects are realised, or the manner of their failure. It is the ongoing projects of Charles' life, the wars in which he was engaged and his struggles with parliament over the power of the sovereign, that show his ungracious manner, his 'hasty and precipitate

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<sup>160</sup> On this point I disagree with Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 188: "In his *History of England*, and in the second *Enquiry*, one richly differentiated 'character' per person is attributed, so 'character' then refers to the *mix of character traits* that a person has exhibited – pretty much what we today mean by character." (Emphasis mine.) The character sketches Hume gives in the *History* imply something more integrated than a mix of (presumably separable) character traits. Cf. p. 75.

resolutions', and his 'deference to persons of a capacity inferior to his own.' His ungracious manner is illustrated by his dealings with parliament on a number of occasions. For example, after Charles failed both to "divert the commons" from pursuing the Petition of Right by setting short time limits and to append a clause "calculated to elude the whole force of the petition," he gave "an answer so vague and indeterminate" when it was submitted for royal assent that it was left ambiguous whether the petition became law or not (H 5:196-98). While his deference to persons of inferior capacity is exemplified by his early favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, whom Hume describes as "animated with a love of glory which he had not talents to merit,"<sup>161</sup> but who nevertheless "acquired an invincible ascendant over the virtuous and gentle temper of the king." (H 5:175)

History is paradigmatic, on Hume's account, of the way in which we learn about character. Hume's commitment to characters rather than actions as the focus of moral judgement leads him to be concerned with the way people are over a period of time (T 3.3.1.4; 575). Through history we can learn about the ongoing projects with which a person is involved and we can also see over the course of the project how it has been completed. Over periods of time and in the context of ongoing projects people's characters can be reliably revealed. And this is significantly similar to the manner in which character is formed. It is the long-term regularity and stability of society that provides the context in which character can both be developed and revealed.

### ***Character and Social Conventions***

The stability of society provides a context in which character can be developed and revealed, but the exact mechanisms through which this is effected require clarification. One of the most important of these is social convention. Conventions arise, on Hume's account, through "a general sense of common interest; which all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules." (T 3.2.2.10; 490) The paradigm case of a

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<sup>161</sup> Buckingham's inferior capacity is most clearly exemplified by the expedition to the Isle of Rhé (H 5:185).

convention of this kind is property, “a convention enter’d into by all the members of the society to bestow stability on the possession of... external goods.” (T 3.2.2.9; 489) In their initial form, conventions are informal, arising merely through a kind of mutual recognition:

[T]he actions of each of us have a reference to those of the other, and are perform’d upon the supposition, that something is to be perform’d on the other part. Two men, who pull the oars of a boat, do it by an agreement or convention, tho’ they have never given promises to each other. (T 3.2.2.10; 490)

In order to row a boat successfully the men need to coordinate their efforts, otherwise the boat will go in circles, but there is no need for there to be an explicit agreement between them; a shared understanding of what needs to be done along with an implicit faith that the other will do his part is sufficient. Hume is insistent that promises are not necessary for basic social conventions to arise. Conventions such as property have to be agreed upon before promises can even make sense; some conventions presuppose others.

Promising arises when we need to transfer property from one person to another in situations where the property is not “*present* and *individual*, but... *absent* or *general*.” He goes on,

One cannot transfer the property of a particular house, twenty leagues distant; because the consent cannot be attended with delivery, which is a requisite circumstance. Neither can one transfer the property of ten bushels of corn, or five hogshead of wine, by the mere expression and consent; because these are only general terms, and have no direct relation to any particular heap of corn, or barrels of wine.

The problems are even greater when it is observed that “the commerce of mankind is not confin’d to the barter of commodities, but may extend to services and actions.” Hume imagines a situation in which there are two farmers:

Your corn is ripe today; mine will be so tomorrow... [but] shou’d I labour with you upon my own account, in expectation of a return, I know I shou’d be disappointed, and that I shou’d in vain depend on your gratitude. Here then I leave you to labour alone: You treat me in the same manner. The seasons change; and both of us lose our harvests for want of mutual confidence and security. (T 3.2.5.8;

Hume is giving an account of the prisoners dilemma, albeit in a more down to earth manner. To resolve these difficulties a new convention is required: “the *institution* and *observance* of promises.” (T 2.3.5.11; 522)

Hume’s account of promising is very simple, rather too simple in fact. We invent “a *certain form of words*... by which we bind ourselves to the performance of any action. This form of words constitutes what we call a promise.”<sup>162</sup> (T 3.2.5.10; 522) Hume certainly oversimplifies promising here. It is both possible to promise something without using a particular form of words (a handshake or a mere nod of the head would be sufficient in some situations) and it is possible to use the form of words while not promising (for example, if one is under duress). These are complicated issues, not mere deficiencies of detail, but neither affects the fundamentals of Hume’s claim, which is that promises arise from “the conventions of men” and involve a formalisation or extension of conventions that exist antecedent to promising. Handshakes are still “*symbols* or *signs*” (T 3.2.5.10; 522) that a promise or a contract has been made, and the conditions that count as duress are themselves often a matter of convention.<sup>163</sup>

The account Hume gives becomes considerably more complex with the development of various other conventions,<sup>164</sup> such as the roles of “civil magistrates, kings and their ministers, our governors and rulers,” (T 3.2.7.6; 537) which develop in order to ensure our obedience to the promises we have made. Society thus becomes more complex as more and more conventions are formed. These conventions intersect and rest upon one another. Promising cannot arise before society has formed to the extent that people recognise one another’s property and

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<sup>162</sup> Since language is also established by convention on Hume’s account (T 3.2.2.10; 490), it is another example of a convention that is required prior to that of promising.

<sup>163</sup> Hume discusses such complications at the end of the section, see T 3.2.5.13-15; 523-525.

<sup>164</sup> These more formal conventions are sometimes referred to as ‘institutions’ (e.g. T 3.2.8.5; 543), although Hume tends to use ‘institution’ as a verb rather than a noun. My use of ‘convention’ should be understood to include everything from primitive, informal conventions to elaborate institutions such as government.



have already instituted means of its transfer (T 3.2.4; 514-16). Magistrates are required to enforce promises against our natural “propension... in favour of what is contiguous above what is remote,” (T 3.2.7.3; 535) by making “the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest.”<sup>165</sup> (T 3.2.7.6; 537)

Conventions such as those described provide the context in which character is formed and discovered. Conventions are required for social order. We require conventions establishing the stability of property and the rules of justice in order for societies to survive (T 3.2.2.7; 487-88). This enables people to engage in long-term projects, because they “acquire a security against each other’s weakness and passion.” (T 3.2.7.8; 538) This is, however, a merely contingent link. Were it the case that we could pursue projects with stability in some other way, such as that the

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<sup>165</sup> The argument Hume gives about the development of magistrates can be taken to count against the importance of character, since Hume treats it as given that we are unable to restrain ourselves in favour of remote benefits. This seems to imply that magistrates are adopted as a remedy for our lack of any strength of character. Something like this argument has been urged on me on two separate occasions: once by Michael Slote at a workshop in Southampton and once by a delegate at the 35<sup>th</sup> Hume Society Annual Conference in Akureyri, Iceland. Both maintained that character was only important for the natural virtues, as the artificial virtues are a matter of rule observance – the motivation for following the rules is, they claimed, unimportant. Hume’s account of magistrates might be taken in support of this argument, as it implies that the strongest motive we have for keeping our promises is the threat of legal punishment, rather than anything distinctly virtuous. It would be strange if Hume really held this view, as it would directly contradict his claim at the very beginning of the discussion of the artificial virtues that “when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produc’d them” (T 3.2.1.2; 477) Moreover, Hume insists upon the importance of “custom and education” to inculcate the rules of justice in children (T 3.2.2.26; 500-501), and that “every one, who has regard to his character” must never “violate those principles.” (T 3.2.2.27; 501) (In this last case Hume is using ‘character’ in a sense very close to ‘reputation’. I discuss this issue below, p. 108.)

Hume’s reference to magistrates as merely changing the situation can be explained by observing that justice requires an entire system (T 3.2.2.22; 497-98). In order for us to rely on justice, therefore, we need to know that all others will do their part, but this is not something that we are prepared to leave to character. Strength of mind, the ability “to resist the temptation of present ease” in favour of “more distant profit,” is not a common capacity (EPM 6.15; 239). If we left the observance of justice to people having the strength of mind to resist temptation the whole system of justice would fall apart.

conditions for justice were changed in such a way as to render it useless (EPM 3.1-21; 183-92),<sup>166</sup> then there would be no requirement for such conventions.<sup>167</sup>

A more substantial link between conventions and character can be derived from the mutual recognition involved in conventions. Many social conventions concern the way in which we are to behave in society dependent on our particular place within it.

There are certain deferences and mutual submissions, which custom requires of the different ranks of men towards each other; and whoever exceeds in this particular, if thro' interest, is accus'd of meanness; if thro' ignorance, of simplicity. 'Tis necessary, therefore, to know our rank and station in the world, whether it be fix'd by birth, fortune, employments, talents or reputation. 'Tis necessary to feel the sentiment and passion of pride in conformity to it, and to regulate our actions accordingly. (T 3.3.2.11; 598-99)

Although the 'deferences and mutual submissions' to which Hume refers here are attributed to custom, it is not custom in the most basic sense in which it is used in the Book One accounts of causation and general rules. In that sense it is hard to see what custom could *require* of anyone. We are *compelled* by custom to expect a certain effect to follow from a certain cause; the grammar of 'require' is quite different. To say that we are required by custom to behave in a certain way implies some normative element, as it is clear that it is possible for us not to behave that way. If I do not care about how I appear in society, assuming no greater sanction of punishment is applicable in a particular case, then it is perfectly within my liberty to pay no heed to these customary deferences. (Hume, of course, thinks that we all care about how we appear in society,<sup>168</sup> and consequently, we all care about the 'deferences and mutual submissions'.) What Hume expresses with the word 'custom' here is better expressed by 'convention'.

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<sup>166</sup> For a briefer discussion of the same point see T 3.2.2.15-18; 493-95.

<sup>167</sup> The same could presumably apply in the case of all other artificial virtues. On Hume's account necessity is very much the mother of invention.

<sup>168</sup> "We can form no wish, which has not a reference to society. A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer. Every pleasure languishes when enjoy'd apart from company, and every pain becomes more cruel and intolerable." (T 2.2.5.5; 363)

In this way conventions establish principles by which character can be known by specifying conditions of compliance and failure. Once there is a convention established for rowing a boat certain expectations arise. Someone who consistently meets the expectations is thereafter referred to as reliable, at least with respect to rowing, while someone who consistently breaks such expectations is referred to as unreliable, at least with respect to rowing. The boat example is, of course, somewhat trivial, but a similar structure can be applied to all conventions. There is a convention that establishes the way in which a British monarch assents to a bill: “pronouncing the usual form of words, *Let it be law as is desired*.”<sup>169</sup> (H 5:200) By transgressing this convention with regard to the Petition of Right, Charles I revealed something of his character. Charles knew full well what was expected of him, but his lack of grace in defeat on this point prevented him from doing what was expected. Knowledge of conventions is part of what makes the conventions themselves. With this in mind it is easy to see how character on this account can fulfil the practical condition. The conventions that determine character are present in society in virtue of their being a matter of an agreed general interest of the members of that society. As such, they constitute a pool of shared knowledge of members of that society and therefore are practically applicable on a day to day basis.

It does not follow from this that everyone in a society knows all of its conventions. Indeed, it is not necessary that *anyone* knows all of them. Nor is it necessary for all conventions to be explicit or codified. People are able to apply the categories of the convention and defer to it, but that does not entail that they are able to *refer* to it. Consequently, we are already some way to seeing how the epistemological condition can be met on this account. It is possible to be mistaken about someone’s character just by being unfamiliar with the relevant conventions. For example, international students are sometimes informed upon arriving at a British university about the British reluctance to make eye contact and that they should not interpret it as dislike.<sup>170</sup> It is easy to see how a student who was not informed of this, which

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<sup>169</sup> The similarity to Hume’s account of the convention of promising is palpable.

<sup>170</sup> I became aware of this when living in a postgraduate community at the University of York which included a large proportion of international students.

interestingly is something that the British by and large are not aware of, might make false judgements about people's manners, if nothing more serious.<sup>171</sup> This does not suffice to explain how the epistemological condition can be fulfilled on my account, but before that account is completed it is necessary to explain the difference between character and reputation.

### ***Reputation, Character, Name***

The link between conventions and character for which I have just argued suggests that character can be understood as being very close to reputation. The two are distinct, but Hume does consider the two to be extremely closely connected, to a sufficient extent that he sometimes elides them. For example,

There is nothing, which touches us more nearly than our reputation, and nothing on which our reputation more depends than our conduct, with relation to the property of others. For this reason, every one, who has any regard to his character, or who intends to live on good terms with mankind, must fix an inviolable law to himself, never, by any temptation, to be induc'd to violate those principles, which are essential to a man of probity and honour. (T 3.2.2.27; 501)

We are, on Hume's account, extremely concerned about our reputation. Among the sections on the causes of pride and humility Hume includes 'Of the Love of Fame', in which he declares, "Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others." (T 2.1.11.1; 316) The list of 'reputation, character, name' implies that Hume regards character as merely a matter of the opinions of spectators. Annette Baier notes that, "the three, for him, are closely linked." She goes on, "Character is not some hidden inner constitution of a person, it is the outward expressive face of that inner nature, which helps determine the role a person plays among other

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<sup>171</sup> It would be a digression here to discuss national character at any length, but the fact that conventions are often peculiar to a society indicates ways in which the close association of character and convention can help to explain how character can be applied to groups rather than just individuals.

persons, and the reputation thereby acquired.”<sup>172</sup>

If we take Hume’s occasional elision of character and reputation seriously Costelloe’s approach will once more begin to look appealing; reputation is imposed onto someone by spectators and implies no reference to any real properties of the person herself. However, some care is required here, for although Hume does occasionally use ‘character’ in a fashion that makes it a synonym of ‘reputation’, even where he does so he quickly distinguishes the two. The argument of ‘Of the Love of Fame’ concerns the influence that others opinions have on us through sympathy. We have a great propensity, Hume says,

to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments... This is not only conspicuous in children, who implicitly embrace every opinion propos’d to them; but also in men of the greatest judgment and understanding, who find it difficult to follow their own reason and inclination, in opposition to that of their friends and daily companions. (T 2.1.11.2; 316)

Immediately, reference is made by Hume to a real distinction of character, namely that of being a man ‘of the greatest judgment and understanding’.<sup>173</sup> This observation is followed up later in the section:

[T]ho’ fame in general be agreeable, yet we receive a much greater satisfaction from the approbation of those... upon whose judgment we set some value... The judgment of a fool is the judgment of another person, as well as that of a wise man, and is only inferior in its influence on our judgment. (T 2.1.11.11; 321)

The opinion of others is important to us, since we acquire by sympathy their opinions and sentiments, but it is not all that character is. We value the opinions of those who are better judges, because they are the people who are most likely to “extol us for those qualities, in which we chiefly excel.” And if a man is esteemed for a quality “he is not possest of... the opinions of the whole world will give him little pleasure in that particular.” (T 2.1.11.13; 322)

The subtlety of Hume’s account allows for relating character and reputation without

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<sup>172</sup> Baier, *Death & Character*, 4.

<sup>173</sup> Exactly what this involves will be discussed in Chapter Five.

conflating the two. Baier's description of character as 'the outward expressive face of inner nature' is highly apt, as it manages to express the fact that character is neither entirely one thing nor the other. The inner nature remains the grounding of character: if it is not represented accurately then the character attribution is false. On the other hand, character attributions are made on the basis of certain conventions, with the consequence that character cannot be completely detached from judgements of character. Character is thoroughly embedded in the social context in which it arises.

### ***Knowledge of Elements***

The stability introduced through the conventions of property, promises, magistrates and justice allows large societies to form. This facilitates sympathy, which both strengthens the ties of society and leads to an increased love of fame and reputation. Sympathy, as was briefly discussed in Chapter Two (p. 47), is a matter of the communication of passions from one person to another. It therefore provides some limited knowledge of character, as McIntyre argues, insofar as it gives us knowledge of the passions of others. Since the passions are an element of character, knowing someone's passions gives us a kind of knowledge of character. But this draws attention to an important feature of the account of knowledge of character given so far: there is a difference between knowing someone's character and knowing the elements that make it up. Or to modify Baier's phrase: we can know the outward expressive face without knowing the inner nature. Knowing someone's passions through sympathy is not necessarily the same as knowing their character. We might sympathetically adopt Charles' preference for Buckingham or his frustration at parliament, but this is not the same as knowing his deference to persons of inferior capacity or his lack of graciousness.

In practical terms this is not a serious problem. The account that I have given above suffices to fulfil the practical condition on an interpretation of Hume's conception of character, as it suffices to explain how ordinary people can come to have practical knowledge of character. Fulfilling the epistemological condition requires more. It was remarked above (p. 107) that the epistemological condition was

partially fulfilled by the complexity of conventions, which offers some explanation of mistaken attributions of character, but in order for this condition to be adequately fulfilled it is necessary to explain how we can come to have knowledge of the elements that constitute character. We need an account of how we can gain knowledge of the inner nature.

Knowledge of one of the elements, the passions, can readily be explained through sympathy, but sympathy does not provide an explanation of how we come to know habits, natural abilities or general rules. To some extent, such questions are general epistemological questions for Hume's philosophy as a whole. Habits, for example, are an important element from early on in Book One of the *Treatise*. General rules are also introduced in Book One and recur in various other contexts. Natural abilities are introduced much later in Book Three, but, as will be shown in Chapter Four, they are not confined to the sections in which they are discussed by name. As general epistemological problems I cannot hope to give a full account of their solution here, but their relevance to questions of character requires some answer.

What makes acquiring knowledge of habits and natural abilities problematic is that, even when they are exercising them, people are unaware of them. In the case of habits this is virtually true by definition: something done out of habit is not something which is done (self-)consciously. "When we follow the habitual determination of the mind, we make the transition without any reflection." (T 1.3.12.7; 133) Natural abilities are not so obviously problematic. Habit is something of which we are unaware because we 'make the transition without any reflection', but natural abilities correspond in many respects to exactly that reflection, which is implicitly a self-conscious process. But this is to mistake what is significant about natural abilities. Everyone is capable of engaging in reasoning, and presumably they can be aware that they are doing so, but natural abilities concern whether or not we reason *well*: intelligently, prudently, patiently.<sup>174</sup> There is no reason to believe that there is a kind of awareness of how well we are reasoning carried with the process of reasoning itself – if there were it would be difficult to explain mistakes – and

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<sup>174</sup> Natural abilities include more than reasoning, as discussed in Chapter Two (p. 60). I stick to reasoning here for the sake of simplicity.

people are notoriously bad at making self-assessments: most people tend to assess themselves as above average.<sup>175</sup>

General rules are a little different. Awareness of general rules might depend on the type of general rules under consideration. GR I are just a matter of habit, so we are presumably unaware of them. If I am racially prejudiced against Irishmen then it does not even occur to me that the Irishman I am confronted with is not a dunce.<sup>176</sup> GR II are, however, conceived more reflectively. If we construe GR II as the outcome of a process of reflection there is no reason to suppose that we are reflecting when we apply them, but if we construe them as the reflective process at the time of application then some kind of awareness is applied. But even in this latter case problems arise. Whether a rule counts as a genuine instance of GR II rather than GR I is presumably dependent upon the quality of the reflection undertaken. It is quite conceivable that someone might realise that GR I are problematic but apply a wholly inappropriate correction. To return to the example of cricket balls and beach balls striking a window, someone may take the erroneous detail that the beach ball is larger to explain why it fails to break the window. Had they considered a sufficient range of cases they would have realised that this detail does not explain the difference. The formation of GR II depends on the quality of someone's natural abilities, and as I argued above, this is not something which carries any intrinsic awareness with it.

To resolve such problems, Hume remarks that habit is "a principle of human nature, which is universally acknowledged, and which is well known by its effects." (EHU 5.5; 43) As it stands this is unsatisfactory, Hume seems content with an appeal to universal acknowledgement, but it offers a hint of a general solution. The problems above were all problems in the first person case, but Hume maintains that it is spectators who (often) have the best knowledge of character. By locating our knowledge of habits in their effects Hume makes that knowledge in principle accessible to anyone. Natural abilities and, under some construals, general rules,

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<sup>175</sup> See Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis* (London: Arrow-Random House, 2006), 66-9.

<sup>176</sup> See above, p. 72.



can also be known by their effects: arriving at the correct result is evidence that someone has reasoned well: explaining multiple instances of a certain phenomenon under different conditions is evidence of applying good rules.<sup>177</sup> Although Hume never suggests such a move it is perfectly consistent with the account I have given above to suggest that conventions can be developed to isolate and evaluate these effects and thereby arrive at knowledge of the causes. Indeed, it might be reasonable to claim that some such conventions have, in fact, been developed. The kinds of conventions that I have in mind are those which are specifically developed for the purposes of evaluation. So, for example, examinations can be used to assess someone's natural abilities in a particular field, and psychological or sociological surveys and experiments can be used to assess people's habits. These methods of evaluation may not be perfect, which might lead to the objection that they are not really giving us knowledge at all. But Hume's account of conventions does not assume that a convention must be perfectly honed when it first originates. A convention, "arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it." (T 3.2.2.10; 490) And new conventions are developed to supplement the deficiencies of the old. Methods for evaluating the elements, or for character in general, will begin quite crudely, but they will gradually be refined.<sup>178</sup>

It is, therefore, finally clear that my account is able to fulfil all three of the conditions which I identified in Chapter One. Costelloe has been shown to be wrong to reject the metaphysical condition, but his emphasis on the practical aspects of character shows the importance of considering the social context in which character takes on such importance. Hume's character sketches in the *Essays* and the *History* embed characters firmly in the lives of their possessors, and it is through the social context in which those lives are lived that we are able to gain practical knowledge of character. One of the chief mechanisms which both forms and reveals character

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<sup>177</sup> Hume holds that calm passions are also "more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation." (T 2.3.3.8; 417) The account I develop here could be extended to apply to these passions if necessary.

<sup>178</sup> The notion of 'perfection' as a criterion for assessment and judgement in Hume's philosophy will be considered in more depth in Chapter Four.

is convention. Convention both facilitates the stability and reliability on which character formation depends and explains how practical knowledge of character is possible. The complexity of conventions, particularly insofar as multiple conventions can be layered on top of one another, provides a partial explanation of how the epistemological condition can be fulfilled, as it explains how people are able to make mistakes of character attribution. Finally, knowledge of the elements of character can be achieved by the development of conventions explicitly to evaluate such elements.

It is now time to consider the specific applications of character in Hume's philosophy: those of the true judge in aesthetics and the moral judge in ethics. This will emphasise the judgement aspect of character that has been touched upon in various places in this chapter. Examination of the character of judges will also show the way in which the different elements of character can be combined to form a composite whole.

# Chapter Four

## The True Judge

‘Of the Standard of Taste’ has received more attention than many of Hume’s essays. Much of this attention has concerned itself with Hume’s discussion of the true judge, which takes up about a third of the essay. There are a number of interesting questions that can be asked about the true judge. Some commentators have focused on the supposed circularity of the definition of the judges and the rules which then issue from their pronouncements.<sup>179</sup> It has also been questioned whether the true judges are to be conceived as real people or as ideal and whether the concept is useful either way.<sup>180</sup> Other attention has focused on why we should listen to the true judge, or how we could identify a true judge if we are not judges ourselves.<sup>181</sup> Finally, there is debate as to why, given particular answers to these questions, Hume thinks that the true judges need to give a joint verdict in order to set a standard of taste (and indeed, whether this would actually set a standard).<sup>182</sup> While these are all interesting and important questions, my approach to them will be oblique.

In the previous three chapters it has been shown that any interpretation of Hume on character must fulfil three conditions, that Hume suggests a heterogeneous collection of elements constitute character and that we are able to have knowledge of character when it is considered in its social context. It was further argued in

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<sup>179</sup> E.g. James Noxon, “Hume’s Opinion of Critics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 2 (1961), and Peter Kivy, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: Breaking the Circle,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 7 (1967).

<sup>180</sup> Jeffrey Wieand, “Hume’s Two Standards of Taste,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 135 (1984), and James Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard of Taste,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 4 (1994).

<sup>181</sup> Jerrold Levinson, “Hume’s Standard of Taste: The Real Problem,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>182</sup> In different ways this question is discussed in all of the articles cited in footnotes 179-181, along with a good many others.

Chapter Three that the elements detailed in Chapter Two cannot be immediately identified with the character attributions made on the basis of social conventions. This chapter will add detail to my account by showing its application to a specific case of Hume's use of the concept of character: the true judge. I will show that Hume's character specification for the true judge is given in terms of a heterogeneous collections of elements. These elements cannot be identified with five separate traits or characteristics of the true judge, as once they are correctly understood they are seen to be intertwined. This implies that the true judge's character should be seen as an integrated whole rather than a collection of separable traits. The character Hume gives of the true judge is by far the most sustained and complete account he gives of any character, lasting eight pages. The fact that this character fits the account that I have given in the first three chapters can be taken as strong supporting evidence for that account.

In earlier chapters there have been numerous remarks and attitudes taken on serious debates in Hume scholarship, but many of these remarks have been tangential to the main argument and have therefore not been fully developed. For the first time in this chapter the focus of interpretation is broader than just Hume's conception of character. Hume's character of the true judge is of great significance for the interpretation of his aesthetics. Although my approach to the questions detailed above will be oblique, my account of the character of the true judge yields answers to some of those questions, some of which will be dealt with explicitly during the discussion. This chapter will therefore show the fruitfulness of my account of Hume's conception of character.

### **'So Rare a *Character*'?**

After discussing the requirements that he thinks are important for someone to be an adequate judge in the arts, Hume summarises his account as follows:

[A] true judge in the finer arts is observed, even during the most polished ages, to be so rare a character: Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to

be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty. (ST<sup>183</sup> 241)

This has often been quoted and attention has been given to the five requirements given by Hume. Yet it has not been asked why Hume describes the true judge as being ‘so rare a *character*’.<sup>184</sup> It must be granted that Hume’s expression here is ambiguous. ‘Character’ here could be just a more elegant substitute for ‘person’, in which case the sentence could be paraphrased, ‘it is rare to find a true judge,’ without any substantive loss. But the list of qualities that follows Hume’s expression, along with the in-depth analysis which precedes it, implies something stronger.

Alternatively, ‘character’ here could be understood as, “The aggregate of the distinctive features of any thing; essential peculiarity; nature, style; sort, kind, description.”<sup>185</sup> This definition seems to get fairly close to Hume’s meaning. It identifies the true judge in terms of an aggregate of features, which does justice to Hume’s list, but it is a definition of the character of things, not the character of persons. At times, Hume talks about the operation of the sentiments involved in a judgement of taste in a mechanistic fashion.

Those finer emotions of the mind are of a very tender and delicate nature, and require the concurrence of many favourable circumstances to make them play with facility and exactness... The least exterior hindrance to such small springs, or the least internal disorder, disturbs their motion, and confounds the operation of the whole machine. (ST 232)

This mechanistic talk makes it sound as though Hume is proposing an idea of a true judge as a machine which we can use for the purpose of detecting beauty. The image that springs to mind is of the judge as an aesthetic divining rod or Geiger

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<sup>183</sup> Owing to the fact that the chief topic of this chapter concerns the interpretation of this one particular essay I will refer to it as ST rather than simply ‘Essays’ as I have done elsewhere.

<sup>184</sup> Some commentators do remark that, as Theodore Gracyk puts it, “one’s taste is as much a part of one’s character as generosity or courage,” but, to my knowledge, no one has really gone on to give serious consideration to the character of the true judge. See Theodore A. Gracyk, “Rethinking Hume’s Standard of Taste,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 2 (1994): 176.

<sup>185</sup> *OED*, “character, n., 9.”

counter,<sup>186</sup> being stood before paintings or taken along to performances to see whether he will resonate. If this reading is correct, there is no reason why the true judge of taste should have to be a person at all. Perhaps it is merely a lack of technological sophistication that prevents us from inventing a machine to detect the finest works of art.

To read the essay in this way would be gravely mistaken. The mechanistic language present in ST is one form of expression among many and Hume's primary aim throughout his philosophy is to give an understanding of human nature, not of inanimate objects. In the *Introduction* to the *Treatise* he wrote,

If therefore the sciences of Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, have such a dependence on the knowledge of man, what may be expected of the other sciences, whose connexion with human nature is more close and intimate? The sole end of logic is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas: Morals and criticism regard our tastes and sentiments: and politics consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other. (T Intr. 5; xv)

Criticism is, as Hume emphasises, to be understood anthropocentrically: it is *our* tastes and sentiments that are to be investigated. The requirements that one must fulfil in order to qualify as a true judge are peculiarly human requirements. Further, Hume allows for variation of taste even amongst the true judges:

A young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who takes pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections... Vainly would we, in such cases, endeavour to enter into the sentiments of others, and divest ourselves of those propensities, which are natural to us. We choose our favourite author as we do our friend, from a conformity of humour and disposition.<sup>187</sup> (ST 244)

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<sup>186</sup> Levinson, "The Real Problem," 228. While I have used Levinson's imagery, I do not impute to Levinson the thought that the true judge is to be understood purely mechanistically, despite these somewhat dehumanising expressions.

<sup>187</sup> There is some debate as to what Hume might mean by these qualifications and whether he is justified in making them. On a superficial reading, at least, it appears that the character of the true judge conflicts with the kind of individual preferences listed by Hume towards the end of the essay. Particularly, the requirement of freedom from prejudice, which states that, "I must depart from... a

With these reflections in mind, Hume must have intended the true judge to be understood in a more personal manner than the definition given above.

I suggest that we should therefore take Hume literally and regard the true judge as a kind of character. The account Hume gives of the true judge is markedly different from the character sketches that he gives in the rest of the *Essays* or the *History*. Those given in the latter are particular sketches, normally of individuals, rather than being general and abstract like that of the true judge. The character of soldiers, given in ‘Of National Characters’, is similarly general and abstract but it differs from the account given of the true judge in other ways. The sketch Hume gives of soldiers is not concerned in any way with their professional capacity, their role as fighters of wars, but with the way of life that comes with that role and the effect that such a way of life has on soldiers’ character. There is no reference in ST to the way of life of the true judge. The character sketch Hume gives of soldiers concerns the way we may expect them to be in common life. Assuming soldiers to be as Hume describes them, we could explain someone’s generosity and honesty by citing her career as a soldier. But there is nothing in ST that would licence a similar explanatory reference. Is the true judge typically snobbish and pedantic? Is she typically polite and compassionate? Hume gives no guidance on these questions. On the other hand, the character of soldiers gives no regard to whether they are any good at soldiering: an inept soldier may be just as gallant and undesigning as the most distinguished member of the battalion.<sup>188</sup> The true judge is opposed to the “bad critic” (ST 236) and the “pretenders” (ST 241): it is central to the character Hume gives of the true judge that she is ‘true’.

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friendship or enmity with the author,” (ST 239) seems to be in tension with the claim that I can ‘choose my favourite author as I do my friend.’ For discussion of this issue, see Michelle Mason, “Moral Prejudice and Aesthetic Deformity: Rereading Hume’s ‘Of the Standard of Taste’,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59, no. 1 (2001), and Christopher Williams, “Hume on the Tedium of Reading Spenser,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>188</sup> Bravery is included among soldiers’ qualities, and there is no denying that this is a very important quality for them to fulfil their primary purpose, but it is notable that this is the only quality listed for which this can be said.

When contrasted with the particular character sketches of the *History* the character of the true judge is general and abstract. But the contrast with the similarly general character of soldiers shows some more interesting features, namely that the character given of the true judge has a very narrow focus, being limited to the judge's capacity as a critic, and is concerned only with how well the judge fulfils that capacity. To put things succinctly, there is a degree of prescription in the character of the true judge that is absent in Hume's other character sketches. For this reason I propose to call the kind of character given to the true judge a character *specification* as opposed to the character *sketches* Hume gives of soldiers and individuals.

It is presumably because of these features of the character of the true judge that so much puzzlement has arisen as to what kind of thing the true judge is supposed to be. The highly abstract nature of the character specification has a rarefied air about it that makes it appear that the true judge is some kind of ideal figure. Hume gives no examples of true judges,<sup>189</sup> nor does he discuss them as embedded in life as he does in his character sketches. I will argue shortly that seeing the true judge as ideal is a mistake. For the moment I merely observe that an abstract character specification implies no more about the reality or ideality of the character it specifies than the abstract specification 'three-sided shape' implies about the reality or ideality of triangles.

If we consider Hume's account of the true judge as a character specification, what should we make of the adjective 'true'? In one sense it is reasonable to see the true judge as merely the opposite of the 'false judge', implied by Hume's references to the 'bad critic' or 'pretender'. This is undoubtedly one of the uses of 'true' which may well have been at the front of Hume's mind, but the word has other complex uses that might prove elucidatory. 'True' can also mean 'straight' or 'faithful, loyal'.<sup>190</sup> If we think of the true judge as being 'straight' then we will perhaps

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<sup>189</sup> It is sometimes supposed, for example by Wieand in his "Hume's Two Standards," 139, that the kinsmen from the *Don Quixote* parable are exemplars of true judges. I discuss this idea below, p. 131.

<sup>190</sup> *OED*, "true, a."



emphasise the aspects of her character that relate to prejudice. The true judge is straight in that she is not swayed by personal affection. If, on the other hand, we emphasise how ‘true’ can mean something like ‘faithful, loyal’ it may at first seem that this implies a kind of prejudice, in that it might imply that the true judge should have a loyalty to particular artists or authors. However, there is no need to think of loyalty as implying bias. The kind of faithfulness or loyalty possessed by the true judge can be seen as a kind of reliability. The true judge is a faithful guide through the potentially confusing world of taste.

Whichever of these different ways in which we see ‘true’ as contributing to the true judge it will not get us to the character specification in full. That character specification consists in detailed accounts of qualities that the true judge must possess in order to qualify for the name. Hume lists five such qualities: strong sense, delicate sentiment, practice, comparison and freedom from prejudice. These five qualities have often been identified by commentators using words like ‘characteristics’, ‘traits’ and ‘virtues’. ‘Characteristics’ is a perfectly serviceable word for the list in many contexts, but I reject it here since the main subject is Hume’s conception of character; ‘characteristics’ is too loaded as a word for my purposes here. Considering them as distinct ‘traits’ or ‘virtues’ is rather misleading. Leaving aside my objections to use of the word ‘trait’ with connection to Hume’s comments on character, the list just looks like a poor candidate for consideration as a list of character traits. The first two items on the list, strong sense and delicate sentiment, look to be identifying perceptual attributes. These could perhaps be described as traits of a person, but not as character traits of a person, nor do they qualify as virtues in any normal sense of the word. The next two items, practice and comparison, invoke some kind of education. Presumably education will result in certain cognitive properties, such as knowledge or perhaps a skill, but this does not seem sufficient for it to be called a character trait or virtue.<sup>191</sup> The final item, freedom from prejudice, is more obviously a character trait. If we describe someone as ‘unprejudiced’ then it seems we are attributing a character trait to them, but

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<sup>191</sup> In Chapter Two I associated education with habits and therefore that it amounted to an element of character. In this chapter I will again argue that education is an element of character, although it is not so clearly associated with habit.

Hume's unorthodox use of 'prejudice' in ST sounds as much like a specific imaginative exercise as a character trait: "A critic... must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgement." (ST 239)

It is thus unclear, even discounting my other reasons for scepticism about traits, that Hume's character specification is a list of character traits or virtues. One possible solution is to amalgamate some of the items in Hume's list. Peter Jones, and other commentators following him, has observed that there are only three traits in Hume's list: strong sense, delicacy of taste and freedom from prejudice, with practice and comparison merely being ways of developing delicacy of taste.<sup>192</sup> Jones is correct to claim that the list needs to be amalgamated, but more radically I suggest that the list is best seen as specifying a single character. All of the items in Hume's list have to be understood as integrated together in order for an accurate character of the judge to be specified.

## **The Character of the True Judge**

To see how Hume's character of the true judge constitutes an integrated whole, it will be necessary to examine the five requirements closely. I will examine them in the order that Hume initially discusses them, an order slightly different from that he gives in the summary. 'Strong sense', which earlier in the essay has been called 'good sense', is the requirement he discusses last, despite its appearance first in the summary.<sup>193</sup> Consequently, I will discuss delicate sentiment first, then practice and comparison together, since they are two sides of the same coin, followed by freedom from prejudice, and finally strong/good sense.

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<sup>192</sup> Peter Jones, "Cause, Reason, and Objectivity in Hume's Aesthetics," in *Hume: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), 333-34.

<sup>193</sup> I find Hume's reordering of the five requirements, along with the change in terminology, quite inexplicable. The closest thing I can give to an explanation is that it is a case of sloppy expression, possibly owing to the relatively short time in which Hume wrote ST. (See Ernest C. Mossner, "'Four Dissertations': An Essay in Biography and Bibliography," *Modern Philology* 48, no. 1 (1950): 43.) But this explanation is inadequate for a number of reasons, not least that Hume repeatedly altered and updated his essays from one edition to the next, but never seems to have done so with ST (Essays, 601 & 630 (on the latter page ST is notable in its absence)).

## *An Embarrassment of Delicacies*

The word ‘delicacy’ features in ST in several different expressions. At the start of the discussion of the character of the true judge he refers to “*delicacy* of imagination.” (ST 234) In the middle of the following page he refers to “*delicacy* of taste” (235), and, by the time he reaches the summary, Hume is talking about “*delicate sentiment*” (241). It is tempting to dismiss this as elegant variation and hence to read all the expressions as referring to the same property. This is, consciously or not, the reaction that has been taken by most commentators on the essay. It is common for commentators to refer to ‘*delicacy of taste*’ as the first of the five qualities listed, despite the fact that the list refers to ‘*delicate sentiment*’.<sup>194</sup> There is a ready explanation for why this is such a natural move, since in the part of the essay which most naturally corresponds to this first quality Hume uses the phrase ‘*delicacy of taste*’ twice, one of which is to give his only explicit definition of the term.<sup>195</sup> But it is also common to find commentators privileging ‘*delicacy of taste*’ as the special or most significant aspect of the true judge’s character.<sup>196</sup> It would be unfair to level this as a strong criticism, in most cases nothing hangs on the terminology used, but I will argue that there is a distinction to be made between at least two different delicacies in ST: ‘*delicacy of sentiment*’ and ‘*delicacy of taste*’. I use the former to denote the first quality on Hume’s list, keeping close to

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<sup>194</sup> For examples of ‘*delicacy of taste*’ being substituted for ‘*delicate sentiment*’, see Malcolm Budd, *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Music* (London: Penguin, 1995), 19; Mary Mothersill, “Hume and the Paradox of Taste,” in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. George Dickie, Richard Sclafani and Ronald Roblin (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 278; Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard,” 437; Wieand, “Hume’s Two Standards,” 135; and Christopher Williams, “Some Questions in Hume’s Aesthetics,” *Philosophy Compass* 2, no. 2 (2007): 159.

<sup>195</sup> To say ‘corresponds to this first quality’ belies the complexity of the structure of ST, but on a superficial reading it is quite easy to dissect the essay. The part of the essay I mean begins in the middle of page 234 and ends close to the top of page 237.

<sup>196</sup> For examples of ‘*delicacy of taste*’ being supposed the main qualification of the true judge see Budd, *Values of Art*, 22-23; Mothersill, “Paradox of Taste,” 279; Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard,” 439; Wieand, “Hume’s Two Standards,” 139. Note that, with exception of Williams, this list is the same as the last one. In none of these cases has it been forgotten that there are other qualities to the true judge, it just feels natural for commentators to privilege delicacy of taste as the most important, while paying lip service to the others.

his terminology of ‘delicate sentiment’. The latter has a broader scope, in my usage, referring to the character of the true judge as a whole. It is less clear that my terminology is close to Hume’s in this case, but there is some suggestion that Hume uses the phrase this way, as will become clear during the discussion. By using the terms as I do I am departing from previous usage by marking an important distinction in Hume’s essay.

Given all these complications, what is there to justify distinguishing delicacy of sentiment from delicacy of taste? I offer three arguments for this: 1) ‘Sentiment’ and ‘taste’ have different meanings, independent of talk of their delicacies, both in general usage and Hume’s own. 2) The object of ST is to establish a standard of taste. Without prejudice to whether Hume succeeds or fails in this aim, it is evidence to suggest that what the true judges are intended to possess, as distinct from other critics, is taste.<sup>197</sup> 3) In the essay ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,’ Hume makes a distinction between the two delicacies in the title of the essay, before discussing the relation of one to the other. The way in which he does this highlights the distinction between delicacy of sentiment and delicacy of taste more clearly than he ever does in ST. This third argument for the distinction between the two delicacies is by far the most complex – it is also the most conclusive – it will therefore be dealt with in a subsection of its own.

(1) ‘Sentiment’ denotes a feeling, which may be (immediately) pleasant or unpleasant and nuanced in various ways. The term has, for Hume, an almost unlimited application, to such an extent that Dabney Townsend declares, “The role of sentiment is to be the ‘glue’ of reasoning.”<sup>198</sup> Peter Jones also notes the extent of ‘sentiment’ in Hume, observing, “the term treacherously covers both feeling and thought, which are otherwise often kept apart by the notions of impression and idea.”<sup>199</sup> ‘Taste’ on the other hand, although given a broad range by Hume,

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<sup>197</sup> Understood in the evaluative, rather than the merely preferential, sense.

<sup>198</sup> Dabney Townsend, *Hume’s Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5. See also pages 125-31, where Townsend argues that belief, for Hume, is tested by, justified by or just *is* sentiment.

<sup>199</sup> Peter Jones, *Hume’s Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh

including morals as well as aesthetics, is more limited. And while *a* taste can be (immediately) pleasant or unpleasant, taste as something one possesses cannot.<sup>200</sup> In general, it may be supposed that ‘taste’ denotes a preference for particular kinds of things and the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of taste will be some kind of sentiment. More briefly, ‘taste’ is a disposition; ‘sentiment’ is, among other things, the outcome of that disposition.<sup>201</sup>

(2) Hume defines his objective in ST as follows: “It is natural for us to seek a *Standard of Taste*; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.” (ST 229) Although this passage is rather strangely worded, rendering Hume’s overall aim unclear,<sup>202</sup> what is sufficiently clear is that, whatever the analysis of the true judge turns out to be, both good and bad critics have sentiments. By implication though, it is only the true judges who possess taste, in the positive evaluative sense of the word.

Unfortunately, neither of these arguments can be claimed to be conclusive, since neither of them make reference to delicacy; once we add delicacy to the equation things become less clear. Delicacy of sentiment must be some kind of disposition or tendency. Someone with delicacy of sentiment will feel things particularly keenly. But this is also the case with delicacy of taste. Further, since Hume’s conception of beauty involves the detection of “particular forms or qualities” (ST 233) in objects

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University Press, 1982), 98.

<sup>200</sup> One may, of course, be unhappy with one’s taste owing to, say, peer pressure or scarcity. If one likes Britpop, but all one’s friends prefer Baroque chamber music, one may well be unhappy in one’s taste owing to the fact that one’s friends go together to concerts, have interesting conversations about music, etc. while one is left to one’s enjoyments alone. Similarly, if one has a taste for whale meat, but the consumption of whale meat is prohibited, then one’s yearning after whale meat may cause one displeasure. But these are cases of a kind of second-order displeasure: the displeasure is not directly the result of one’s taste, but of one’s situation.

<sup>201</sup> “[T]he distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and *taste* are easily ascertained. The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the *sentiment* of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue.” (EPM App. 1.21; 294, final emphasis mine)

<sup>202</sup> Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard,” 437 and *passim*.

and he assumes that “there be an entire or a considerable uniformity of sentiment among men” (ST 234), it makes it hard to see what room Hume has left to distinguish the two. It would, on the other hand, be strange if the simple addition of ‘delicacy’ to two quite different terms would give the same outcome. So while these observations provide no argument for distinguishing delicacy of sentiment from delicacy of taste, they do give us reason for treating their assimilation with suspicion. Fortunately, the discussion Hume gives of delicacy of taste in one of his earlier essays proves these suspicions well-founded.

### ***Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion***

(3) To help clarify the difference between delicacy of sentiment and delicacy of taste it is helpful to look at Hume’s considerably earlier essay ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,’ first published 1742. The unfortunate effect of using this source to clarify the matter is that, at first, it will complicate things, since it introduces a further delicacy: delicacy of passion. Fortunately, this is not so troublesome as it may appear, since, unlike the other two delicacies under discussion, Hume gives a clear definition of what he means by ‘delicacy of passion’:

SOME People are subject to a certain *delicacy of passion*, which makes them extremely sensible to all the accidents of life, and gives them a lively joy upon every prosperous event, as well as a piercing grief, when they meet with misfortune and adversity... People of this character have, no doubt, more lively enjoyments, as well as more pungent sorrows, than men of cool and sedate tempers... [W]hen a person, that has this sensibility of temper, meets with any misfortune, his sorrow or resentment takes entire possession of him, and deprives him of all relish in the common occurrences of life; the right enjoyment of which forms the chief part of our happiness. (Essays 4)

Owing to the similarity of the names, it would perhaps be thought that delicacy of passion could be identified with delicacy of sentiment, but this is not the case. ‘Passion’ has a technical meaning for Hume that ‘sentiment’ does not and it is clear that the technical use is very much in play in Hume’s description of delicacy of passion. As has already been discussed in Chapter Two (p. 52), Hume divides the passions into two kinds,

*viz.* the *calm* and the *violent*. Of the first kind is the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects. Of the second are the passions of love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility. This division is far from being exact. The raptures of poetry and music frequently rise to the greatest height; while those other impressions, properly call'd *passions*, may decay into so soft an emotion, as to become, in a manner, imperceptible. (T 2.1.1.3; 276)

The appearance of grief and joy in both the list of violent passions and the description of delicacy of passion, coupled with the observation that in the latter passions take 'entire possession' of the person, shows that in the case of delicacy of passion Hume is using 'passion' in what he calls its proper sense. Delicacy of passion indicates an extreme level of emotional sensitivity, just like delicacy of sentiment, but since delicacy of passion is sensitivity to 'all the accidents of life' resulting in a kind of fervency, it robs its possessor of enjoyments. The curious upshot of this is that delicacy of passion, being a kind of hypersensitivity, gets in the way of other kinds of sensitivity. A person who is continually suffering from fervent grief will be unable to appreciate many things that the rest of us take for granted. Delicacy of passion is therefore considered by Hume to be a bad thing.<sup>203</sup>

The main theme of 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion' is the remedial effect which developing delicacy of taste can have on delicacy of passion. Hume's definition in the earlier essay is irritatingly brief:

There is a *delicacy* of *taste* observable in some men, which very much resembles this *delicacy* of *passion*, and produces the same sensibility to beauty and deformity of every kind, as that does to prosperity and adversity, obligations and injuries. When you present a poem or a picture to a man possessed of this talent, the delicacy of his feeling makes him be sensibly touched with every part of it... In short, delicacy of taste has the same effect as delicacy of passion: It enlarges the sphere both of our happiness and misery, and makes us sensible to pains as well as pleasures, which escape the rest of mankind. (Essays 4-5)

The distinction between the two here seems to be just a matter of the objects involved: delicacy of taste is just delicacy of passion for poems and pictures rather

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<sup>203</sup> There are certain similarities between Hume's description of delicacy of passion and his account of enthusiasm, discussed in Chapter Two (p. 69).

than ‘all the accidents of life’. The distinction between calm and violent passions is helpful here. Instead of the distinction between the two being understood as between two different objects, it can be understood as being a difference between two different kinds of passion, one calm, the other violent. This requires a refinement of the distinction between the violent and the calm passions, since when Hume first introduces it he makes the distinction in terms of their typical objects. However, he immediately describes himself as taking advantage of a “vulgar and specious division” (T 2.1.1.3; 276) and his discussion later in Book Two (T 2.3.4) can be seen as a refinement of the distinction. One of the main differences between the two in the more refined discussion of T 2.3.4 is not in terms of the strength or effect of the passion, but in terms of the “disorder” characteristic of the violent passions. In pursuit of his main theme, Hume proceeds:

I am persuaded, that nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the *cultivating of that higher and more refined taste*, which enables us to judge of the characters of men, of compositions of genius, and of the productions of the nobler arts. A greater or less relish for those obvious beauties, which strike the senses, *depends entirely upon the greater or less sensibility of the temper*: But with regard to the sciences and liberal arts, ...no man, who is not possessed of the soundest judgement, will ever make a tolerable critic in such performances. And this is a new reason for *cultivating* a relish in the liberal arts. (Essays 6, all emphases mine)

There is a lot going on in this passage and to give it a full interpretation would be too lengthy here. It is notable that there are many common points between this paragraph and what goes on in the discussion of the true judge in ST. The ‘tolerable critic’ of ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion’ is a protean version of the true judge in ST. What is significant is that here Hume clearly refers to delicacy of taste as something that is *cultivated*. It is also significant that he contrasts a ‘higher and more refined taste’ with ‘relish for those obvious beauties’ that ‘depends entirely upon the greater or less sensibility of the temper’. There is a contrast made by Hume here between a natural capacity (‘sensibility of the temper’) and a cultivated talent (‘delicacy of taste’). The full significance of this is revealed with a restatement of Hume’s summary of the five requirements of the true judge: strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison,



and cleared of all prejudice. If we leave strong sense and freedom from prejudice to one side, the result is: delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison. This is obviously an expression of a natural capacity, followed by a means of cultivation.<sup>204</sup> Between 1742 and 1756 Hume's terminology has changed, and the relation has been strengthened (there is no mention of 'obvious beauties' in the later essay), but the distinction remains.

Observing this connection between delicate sentiment on the one hand, and practice and comparison on the other, is neither new nor controversial; I have already observed that Peter Jones, and others, have proposed that Hume's list should be abbreviated to three traits (p. 122). What is new is the distinction made between delicacy of taste and delicacy of sentiment. This may seem somewhat insignificant, but, in fact, it is important to recognise that this distinction is at work in ST, not least because Hume himself blurs the distinction.

### ***Delicacy of Sentiment as Natural Capacity***

From this point on 'delicacy of sentiment' will be used to denote some kind of natural capacity. It is thus distinguished from 'delicacy of taste', which has a broader application to the character of the true judge as a whole. In order to give a full definition of the latter, it is necessary to analyse each of the five requirements Hume makes of the true judge. Having cleared some confusion and established a distinction between, what I at least am calling, delicacy of sentiment and delicacy of taste, and both from delicacy of passion, it should now be possible to give an outline of what delicacy of sentiment can be taken to mean.

At first glance, the distinction that has been established between delicacy of sentiment and delicacy of taste looks to be helpful. Delicacy of taste is a cultivated faculty: why not then say that delicacy of sentiment is simply uncultivated delicacy of taste? *Prima facie* this would be a simple way of delineating, at least roughly, what delicacy of sentiment may be. This is, perhaps, bolstered by Hume's talk of

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<sup>204</sup> I actually hold that all the remaining four are significant in terms of cultivation, but for now it is clearer to include merely these three.

‘obvious beauties’ in ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion.’ With these observations in mind it may seem that we could understand delicacy of sentiment as being a crude, uncultivated delicacy of taste.

This definition is unavailable for two reasons. First, if delicacy of sentiment were crude, only involving the detection of ‘obvious beauties’, then it would not be a delicacy at all. Second, Hume defines what I am arguing is delicacy of taste in terms of delicacy of sentiment. To define delicacy of sentiment in terms of delicacy of taste would be to give a circular definition. So although it is true that delicacy of sentiment is uncultivated and delicacy of taste is cultivated, this observation merely marks the distinction, it does not suffice to give a substantial clarification of either concept. Moreover, while Hume gives more obvious information regarding the meaning of delicacy of taste, it seems that the more basic, since it is uncultivated, faculty needs to be defined first, to allow the definition of delicacy of taste to proceed.

Fortunately, Hume does give us a definition of delicacy of sentiment, independently of delicacy of taste. Unfortunately, Hume obfuscates his definition by mixing it in with observations about delicacy of taste. The definition of delicacy of sentiment, as opposed to delicacy of taste, is to be found, I submit, in the *Don Quixote* story. The full story runs as follows:

It is with good reason, says SANCHO to the squire with the great nose, that I pretend to have a judgement in wine: This is a quality hereditary in our family. Two of my kinsmen were once called to give their opinion of a hogshead, which was supposed to be excellent, being old and of a good vintage. One of them tastes it; considers it; and after mature reflection pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his verdict in favour of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they were both ridiculed for their judgement. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hogshead, there was found at the bottom, an old key with a leathern thong tied to it. (ST 234-5)

This story has, of course, received a vast amount of commentary, but, given the

distinction I have drawn between delicacy of sentiment and delicacy of taste, I think it can be read in a different light. There is no mention in the story of Sancho's kinsmen having cultivated a taste for wine. Instead, the only reference made by Sancho is to having a judgement in wine as 'a quality hereditary in our family'. This makes the story apt to illustrate delicacy of sentiment, not delicacy of taste.

It is unlikely that Hume saw the story as illustrating one concept rather than the other. As I have argued in the previous few pages, Hume does not distinguish delicacy of sentiment from delicacy of taste as clearly as he should have done. Nonetheless, there are two distinct concepts at work in his essay. Once this is recognised it is possible to pick apart the threads of his reasoning and so recognise that the story is more apt to illustrate one concept than the other. That Hume is unlikely to have regarded the story as illustrating delicacy of sentiment rather than delicacy of taste is testified by his comment shortly after the story. "Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: This we call delicacy of taste, whether we employ these terms in the literal or metaphorical sense." (ST 235) This definition fits delicacy of taste, a cultivated capacity, far better than it fits delicacy of sentiment.<sup>205</sup>

Jeffrey Wieand observes that in the *Quixote* story both of Sancho's kinsmen deliver a mistaken judgement, as "one fails to detect the taste of iron, the other the taste of leather." But Wieand, mistakenly on my account, holds that the kinsmen, "have delicacy of taste," and thus claims that the story indicates that,

Since the true judges are people who *have* the five characteristics, not people who necessarily *use* them on every occasion, there is no reason to suppose that one true judge (or all of them) may not fail to use one or more of the characteristics on a particular occasion and thus judge *incorrectly*.<sup>206</sup>

The question as to whether the true judge can make a mistake will be considered

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<sup>205</sup> Although this definition testifies to the unlikelihood of Hume meaning 'delicacy of taste' as the first item of the list of qualities, its location in the text surely explains the temptation to substitute it into that list (see above, p. 123).

<sup>206</sup> Wieand, "Hume's Two Standards," 139.

later, once the full picture of the true judge has been articulated, but it will suffice to say for the moment that, by my reading, the *Quixote* story is no evidence for it. James Shelley is more astute on this point, noting, “Hume never says the kinsmen possess delicacy of taste, and this is the sole example we have of their abilities, which, however remarkable, fall short of the delicacy Hume describes.” Shelley’s reading, however, leaves the place of the story in Hume’s essay obscure. If the kinsmen fail to exhibit what Hume requires of them, why does he introduce them in the first place? Shelley speculates that the story is “to indicate that true judges are ideal.” But although there is a case to be made that the true judges are ideal, there is even less reason to suppose that the *Quixote* story indicates this than to suppose that the kinsmen possess delicacy of taste. Shelley’s speculation is supposedly underpinned by the fact that Hume has modified the story from the original,

in order to emphasise the wrongness of the kinsmen’s verdicts... [I]n Don Quixote the kinsmen simply note the taste of the foreign substances, while in Hume’s essay each incorrectly asserts that the wine would be good if it weren’t for the presence of one of the foreign flavours.<sup>207</sup>

Shelley is correct that Hume’s alterations ‘emphasise the wrongness of the kinsmen’s verdicts,’ but this observation does nothing to underpin his speculation, and in the absence of any clear intention behind the changes it is most natural to write them off as the result of an “eighteenth-century insouciance regarding accuracy of quotation.”<sup>208</sup> Similarly, if the purpose of the *Quixote* story were to illustrate delicacy of taste, then the most natural move would be to condemn Hume as having made an elementary mistake: the story is supposed to illustrate delicacy of taste, it does not, therefore it should be discounted. The central place of the story in ST makes this move unappealing; to reject the story would undermine several of the key claims of the essay. The principle of charity, if nothing else, compels us to seek an alternative explanation.

What does taking the *Quixote* story as a metaphorical illustration of delicacy of sentiment allow us to say about this mysterious faculty? It has already been

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<sup>207</sup> Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard,” 439.

<sup>208</sup> Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, x.

observed that Sancho identifies the ability as ‘hereditary’. Later in the essay, Hume writes, “But though there be naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy between one person and another, nothing tends further to encrease and improve this talent, than *practice* in a particular art.” (ST 237) Practice will be considered shortly. For the present issue, the interesting element of this passage is that the delicacy at issue is ‘natural’. Obviously, ‘hereditary’ and ‘natural’ have different meanings, but the issue of actual origin is unimportant in this context. Both words imply that delicacy of sentiment is something that someone just has, the implication being that it is something with which someone is born.

A further detail of the *Quixote* story worth noting is the fact that both of the kinsmen are able to detect something that other people have been unable to detect – the wine is ‘supposed to be excellent’ and Sancho’s kinsmen are ridiculed when they express reservations on this front – but neither of them manages to detect all of the details. Consequently, delicacy of sentiment can be said to be unusual, if not rare.<sup>209</sup> It involves a heightened capacity of perception, but not one that is by any means infallible.

What exactly is perceived through delicacy of sentiment? There is no straight textual answer to this given in ST. However, it became apparent earlier in the discussion that delicacy of passion marks a particular sensitivity to the violent passions, while delicacy of taste marks a particular sensitivity to the calm passions (p. 128). As the distinction between delicacy of sentiment and delicacy of taste is merely a matter of cultivation, delicacy of sentiment should also mark a sensitivity to the calm passions. The objects of delicacy of sentiment are therefore, ‘beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects.’ This might appear somewhat obvious, but it is worth observing the subject matter of these capacities,

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<sup>209</sup> On this point I am again disagreeing with Wieand. “On the whole, I think, Hume believes that the failure to feel the proper sentiment can be attributed in most cases not to constitutionally inferior faculties, but to those which have become unhealthy or unsound or which are improperly employed.” (Wieand, “Hume’s Two Standards,” 135.) Although I agree that the three problems Wieand lists towards the end are real concerns for Hume, I think that there is a place for constitutionally *superior* faculties in the case of the true judge. How much Hume has invested in this claim is a different question.

since Hume's obfuscates the point by his overuse of sensory analogies in ST. It was noted above (p. 121) that 'delicate sentiment' sounds as though it is picking out a perceptual capacity. We can now see that this is true, but should be treated with care. As a sensitivity to the calm passions, delicacy of sentiment is a sensitivity to a kind of reflective impression rather than an impression of sensation. Right from the start, with delicacy of sentiment, Hume makes spaces for the "interposition of... idea[s]." (T 2.1.1.1; 275) Peter Kivy, who argues at length in favour of the cognitive aspects of Hume's aesthetics, obscures this point in his opposition of "two faculties of taste" in ST, "an epistemic and a non-epistemic kind" with "*delicacy of taste* embodying the non-epistemic kind."<sup>210</sup>

In summary: delicacy of sentiment is distinct from delicacy of taste. Delicacy of sentiment is a natural, yet imperfect, capacity for perception. Delicacy of sentiment is at least unusual; people who possess it are more sensitive than others to the relevant kinds of things, specifically those things that tend to give rise to the calm passions. It must also be the case that delicacy of sentiment has the potential for cultivation. It is to Hume's account of this cultivation that I now turn.

### ***Practice and Comparison***

Practice and comparison are, for Hume, the primary means of cultivation of delicacy of sentiment. They receive relatively little discussion in ST and, since they are relatively uncontroversial, will only be discussed fairly briefly. They are, however, worth discussing together, since ultimately they amount to the same thing.

Hume introduces practice with what amounts to his most direct account of delicacy

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<sup>210</sup> Peter Kivy, "Hume's Neighbour's Wife: An Essay on the Evolution of Hume's Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 23, no. 3 (1983): 204. From the context it is clear that by 'delicacy of taste' Kivy means what I am calling 'delicacy of sentiment'. Kivy repeats the opposition in his "Hume's Sentiments in the Essay on Taste," in *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson & Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 306-8, where he also expresses doubts, albeit in response to a different problem, about the association between sentiment and calm passions on which I am relying here.

of sentiment in the essay.

When objects of any kind are first presented to the eye or imagination, the sentiment, which attends them, is obscure and confused; and the mind is, in a great measure, incapable of pronouncing concerning their merits or defects. The taste cannot perceive the several excellencies of the performance; much less distinguish the particular character of each excellency, and ascertain its quality and degree. If it pronounce the whole in general to be beautiful or deformed, it is the utmost that can be expected; and even this judgement, a person, so unpractised, will be apt to deliver with great hesitation and reserve. (ST 237)

But while this may be a direct and reasonably sustained account, it is not to be taken as the most accurate. Hume's purpose here is to emphasise the importance of practice. As such, the account of our state prior to such practice is somewhat overblown. Indeed, the strong tendency of the passage implies that we are only able to detect 'obvious beauties', but, as the *Quixote* story indicates, this is not quite the case. Hume is consistent in saying that our perception before practice will be 'obscure and confused', but he exaggerates the inability to 'perceive the several excellencies of the performance', and his statement that the judgement of the whole to be beautiful or otherwise is hampered by 'great hesitation and reserve' is just plain wrong. Clearly, the *Quixote* story shows that someone with delicacy of sentiment may be able to perceive some of the (subtle) excellencies of the performance; the problem arises from the fact that she does not perceive all of them, nor can she reliably claim that she has perceived the most important. Consequently, any judgement she makes on the whole will be unreliable. The idea that she will only deliver judgements with hesitation and reserve is implausible. Surely someone who lacks experience is, other things being equal, more likely to jump to conclusions. Only when she has some experience is she likely to be aware of the difficulty of making judgements and hence to withhold her judgement in some cases.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> How much 'hesitation and reserve' someone shows in making judgements which she is unqualified to make can be thought of as a function of her character in general. For example, someone with an over-inflated opinion of herself may think that her opinion is of significance and interest regardless of her qualifications, while someone of a very timid disposition may hesitate to give her opinion despite being better qualified than her peers. Hume has forgotten in this passage from ST the importance of "a due degree of pride," which he emphasises in the *Treatise* (T 3.3.2.8;

Rather than focusing on the aspects of the accounts of practice and comparison that (mis)represent delicacy of sentiment, it is interesting to focus on the language Hume uses to describe the action of practice and comparison upon delicacy of sentiment. This language has two main themes. First, at several points Hume uses metaphors of lucidity. Prior to practice, “the sentiment... is obscure and confused.” On first acquaintance with any piece our perceptions are “confound[ed]” by “a flutter and hurry of thought,”<sup>212</sup> details “seem wrapped up in a species of confusion” such that they are only perceived “indistinctly.” But once we have practice, “A clear and distinct sentiment attends [us]... The mist dissipates, which formerly seemed to hang over the object.” (ST 237-38) From these ways of describing the effect of practice, coupled with earlier observations, it would be accurate to say that the person with (uneducated) delicacy of sentiment will indistinctly recognise some of the properties of the object, while recognising others clearly, but upon further practice with the kind of object in question will be able to detect a greater array of properties. In this respect comparison is essentially the same as practice; it is because the educated person is aware of contrasts that he is capable of spotting certain properties.<sup>213</sup>

Secondly, Hume’s language when discussing practice and comparison involves a large number of (grammatical) comparatives. The person who is gaining practice finds that her “feeling becomes *more* exact and nice,” her organs “acquire *greater* perfection in [their] operations.” She ceases to be impressed by the “*coarsest* daubing” and the “*most* vulgar ballads,”<sup>214</sup> and now judges everything new that she encounters in comparison to the “*most* finished object, with which [she] is acquainted,” with the result that “great *inferiority* of beauty gives pain” to her (ST

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596-97).

<sup>212</sup> Compare this expression with Hume’s comment concerning the effect of custom on the passions, quoted above, p. 67.

<sup>213</sup> This idea was briefly discussed in Chapter Two (p. 50). I discuss comparison at considerably greater length in Chapter Five. See below, p. 159.

<sup>214</sup> ST is different from ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion’ here: the ‘obvious beauties’ remain beauties to the cultivated observer, whereas these ‘coarse daubings’ and ‘vulgar ballads’ are no longer seen as beauties following cultivation.



237-38, emphases mine). This may seem a rather trivial observation: of course practice and comparison are matters of degree. But given that practice and comparison are processes which clarify and improve delicacy of sentiment it follows that delicacy of taste is a matter of degree. This observation should lead us to treat Hume's references to 'perfections' and 'imperfections' with reference to the qualities of the true judge with a degree of scepticism.<sup>215</sup>

### ***Freedom from Prejudice***

Prejudice has already featured, albeit briefly, in Chapter Two (p. 72), but while the notion of prejudice at work in ST is best understood as being an instance of GR II, understood as a process involving natural abilities and habits, it has some notable differences from the discussion that briefly appears in Book One of the *Treatise*. To briefly recap, the discussion in Book One involved the Irishman whom is believed to be witless, contrary to actual evidence, on the basis of past experience of numerous witless Irishmen (T 1.3.13.7; 146-47). In ST the notion of freedom from prejudice is rather different. Indeed, it seems not to be an instance of freedom *from* anything. Hume characterises it as follows:

[E]very work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view... [The artist] addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices... A critic of a different age or nation, who should peruse this [work of art], must have all these circumstances in his eye, and must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgement of the [work of art].<sup>216</sup> In like manner, when any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my

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<sup>215</sup> See particularly, ST 236 and 241. Shelley emphasises Hume's frequent references to perfections in support of his claim "that true judges are ideal", without pausing to consider what 'perfect practice' or 'perfect comparison' might mean. See Shelley, "Hume's Double Standard," 439.

<sup>216</sup> Hume is specifically discussing oratory here, but the general context of the passage and the discussion which follows it makes clear that he thinks his observations hold for works of art in general. Hume's selection of oratory, which has an readily identifiable audience, as his example, obscures the complexity of this point.

individual being and peculiar circumstances. (ST 239)

Hume's notion of freedom from prejudice is more like an imaginative engagement with the work of art, taking into account the intended audience of the work. Hume is a little ambiguous as to whether the critic merely need make allowances for the prejudices of the audience, or whether he has to place himself in their position. The fact that it is impossible to literally place oneself in the position of many audiences (perhaps any audience of which one is not actually a member) might be considered as evidence in favour of picking the former option, and it may be the reason for Hume's own equivocation on this point, but Hume's theory requires that the second be closer to what he intends. Since judgements of taste, and all judgements on Hume's account, are a matter of feeling a particular sentiment it cannot be merely a matter of making allowances.<sup>217</sup>

There are several points that need to be noted concerning Hume's account of freedom from prejudice here. First, there is some cognitive element involved. Discovering the 'particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices' of the intended audience of a work of art requires a fair amount of knowledge. But it is also clear that this cannot be a merely intellectual exercise. Hume's own example of oratory could have caused him to understate this point, since in the case of oratory discovering the interests and opinions of the audience, never mind their prejudices, might conceivably be done in a manner that is largely independent of the art form, or the work of art. Yet even the study of oratory will involve the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge that cannot be divorced from oratory itself. To fully appreciate a great speech it is necessary to know rhetorical tropes, principles of rhythm, and precedent speeches to which allusions may be made.<sup>218</sup> This kind of knowledge cannot be attained without study of oratory itself, as it is vital to know what the different methods look like in practice to be able to identify them in a new example.

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<sup>217</sup> This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Five, as Hume implies more strongly that the moral judge merely makes allowances. See below, p. 180.

<sup>218</sup> For Hume discussing something akin to the first two, see his discussion in 'Of Tragedy' of Cicero (Essays 219-20). Hume does not to my knowledge discuss artistic traditions and allusions, but such a view is both compatible with his freedom from prejudice requirement and implied by it.

This is even more pronounced in the case of other art forms, where the ‘particular genius’ of the intended audience might involve a considerable amount of knowledge of other works of art in the tradition of which it is part. This tradition will involve established and traditional modes of presentation and representation. An educated audience will expect to encounter these structures, which will help them to understand what the artist is attempting to communicate or express. But, of course, works of art sometimes disappoint our expectations on this front, either because they are poorly executed or, more interestingly, because they have developed, modified or rebelled against the established modes of (re)presentation. *28 Days Later* is a brilliant development of the zombie film genre in part because the ‘infected’ do not move like traditional zombies. Yet it is clearly recognisable as a zombie film, since it retains many of the typical features of that genre. The audience is led to expect one thing, but is given something different, and in this case it makes the film more engaging than the rather tired zombie genre.

The requirement Hume makes that the critic must ‘place himself in the same situation as the audience’ is not clearly distinguishable from the exercise of practice and comparison. Understanding the audience requires practice insofar as it requires that the judge be aware of (some of) the same works of art as the intended audience. Knowledge of these works leads to a kind of habit, an expectation of a particular mode of (re)presentation, but it must be more flexible than habit, since it must be possible to take pleasure in variations from the expected mode of (re)presentation. There is a ready model in Hume’s philosophy: GR II. Freedom from prejudice involves adopting certain kinds of habits and expectations when experiencing a particular work of art, but maintaining some kind of regulative control over those habits. For this reason, Hume sometimes refers to practice as viewing a particular work more than once:

[It is] requisite, that that very individual performance be more than once perused by us, and be surveyed in different lights with attention and deliberation. There is a flutter or hurry of thought which attends the first perusal of any piece, and which confounds the genuine sentiment of beauty. (ST 237-38)

I submit that this should be read as implying that when we first experience any work (under the assumption that we know what kind of work it is, have experience

of other works of that type, etc.) we have certain habitual expectations of what the work will deliver. Our perception of the work will be clouded by our expectations, which will prevent us from allowing the work to speak for itself. In a sense, we will see it as an instantiation of a type rather than as an individual work of art. We are able to counter this ‘flutter and hurry of thought’ by carefully perusing the work again. Conversely, there are works of art which are “florid and superficial” but soon “pall upon the taste.” (ST 238)<sup>219</sup> In other words, we are able to counteract the operations of habit through taking time and perhaps considering the relation to other works of art we have experienced.

Freedom from prejudice is closely related to comparison as well as to practice. Comparison involves the ability “to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations.” (ST 238) This is clearly not possible without freedom from prejudice. The critic must be able to adopt the position of audiences belonging to different ages and nations in order to make such comparisons. This is the explicit role Hume initially gives to freedom from prejudice: “But to enable a critic the more fully to execute this undertaking, he must preserve his mind free from all *prejudice*.” (ST 239)

With all these observations in mind, we need to return to considering exactly what Hume requires when he declares that the judge either needs to have ‘all these circumstance in his eye’ or ‘must place himself in the same situation as the audience’. It was noted earlier (p. 138) that there is an ambiguity here, since the two are not quite the same thing, but having examined the notion more closely it is perhaps not difficult to see that there should be a degree of ambiguity here, since becoming free from prejudice in the sense Hume is discussing here is a process which admits of degree. The expression ‘freedom *from*’ implies a negative conception, but Hume has something positive in mind. The practice required to gain the particular genius of the intended audience is not entirely inaccessible, since to some extent it is a matter of being familiar with other works with which the

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<sup>219</sup> This echoes Hume’s discussion of novelty in the *Treatise*: “[E]very thing, that is new, is most affecting, and gives us either more pleasure or pain, than what, strictly speaking, naturally belongs to it.” (T 2.3.5.2; 423)

audience would have been familiar, and possibly that they would have regarded as good works (whether they are still regarded as such is so far irrelevant). But there are other things about the intended audience that the judge cannot take on in such a way. We can learn much about Athenian society, but however much we learn we will never quite know what it was like to be Athenian. There are thus some things which the judge can only know intellectually ('have in her eye') but others that she can come to possess as her own (be 'in the same situation').

### ***Good/Strong Sense***

I suggested in the last section that freedom from prejudice could be understood as an instance of GR II. In this case we should expect to find a role for natural abilities regulating the habitual response involved, which is exactly what Hume suggests.

[I]n all questions, submitted to the understanding, prejudice is destructive of sound judgment, and perverts all operations of the intellectual faculties: It is no less contrary to good taste... It belongs to *good sense* to check its influence in both cases; and in this respect, as well as in many others, reason, if not an essential part of taste, is at least requisite to the operations of this latter faculty. (ST 240)

The references to 'sound understanding', 'intellectual faculties' and 'reason' make it clear that Hume is referring to natural abilities. Freedom from prejudice is a matter of being able to put oneself in the position of the intended audience of the work, at least as far as this is possible. As I suggested above, this might require a certain amount of intellectual knowledge, but it also requires practical knowledge of the tradition to which the work of art belongs. Knowledge of the tradition is a matter of practice and comparison. The ability to make comparisons is a matter of being able to make subtle distinctions between different works. Here delicacy of sentiment and good sense come together, since both involve making fine grained distinctions, but of different types.

In his discussion of general rules, Dabney Townsend highlights the fact that what Hume calls "unphilosophical probabilities" (T 1.3.13; 143)<sup>220</sup> are a matter of our

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<sup>220</sup> The reference is to the section title; the expression 'unphilosophical probabilities' never appears in the body of the text.

awareness of the things that are influencing our beliefs: “Insensibly, proximity of facts, distance of memory, and complication of argument affect the transitions from ideas to other impressions and increase or decrease the strength of the impressions.”<sup>221</sup> All these insensible factors have an effect upon our beliefs and, consequently, our sentiments. In the case of works of art, it is the imagination rather than belief that is involved, but the mechanism for Hume is fundamentally the same, as “belief is nothing but a firmer and stronger conception of an object than what attends the mere fictions of the imagination.” (EHU 6.3; 57) This kind of insensible operation is the kind of thing that may cause us to come to erroneous beliefs, such as in the case of GR I, because we do not appreciate all the factors at work. Townsend does not identify the role that natural abilities have to play here in both making us aware of these subtle influences and the ability to tell them apart. It is important to note that there are two different ways in which we may be affected here. One way is the kind of insensible influence to which Townsend refers. In this case the difference is having a real effect on our beliefs and sentiments but we are insensible of the cause of the influence. The other way in which insensible operations may give rise to erroneous beliefs and sentiments is where we are insensible of there being any difference at all and hence treat subtly different cases as though they were the same. This latter case, although Townsend does not discuss it, is perhaps more central to aesthetics, since it seems to be precisely the kind of delicacy that Hume is describing. It is included in delicacy of sentiment, in that the kinsmen perceive a cause that is insensible to others, and prior to practice someone’s “taste cannot perceive the several excellencies of the performance; much less distinguish the particular character of each excellency, and ascertain its quality and degree.” (ST 237) This shows clearly that such a case of insensible causes may be a matter for the sentiments, but it is no less the case for reasoning. In his expansion upon good sense, Hume declares, “every kind of composition, even the most poetical, is nothing but a chain of propositions and reasonings.” (ST 240) While this is a deplorable model of poetry the underlying point that a certain degree of reasoning or understanding is required to understand a poem, or any work of art, is undoubtedly true.<sup>222</sup> And if we are incapable of such reasoning, two poems that

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<sup>221</sup> Townsend, *Hume’s Aesthetic Theory*, 171.

<sup>222</sup> If nothing else, we must be able to understand that it is a work of art.

are superficially similar (e.g. they are both sonnets) but of very different quality (e.g. owing to their use of metaphor and allusion) may be to us indistinguishable. If this is the case it is quite possible that they both have the same effect upon us.<sup>223</sup>

Strong sense is thus essential to the true judge and is intertwined with the other four requirements. Delicacy of sentiment is the prerequisite to having taste, a natural capacity for making fine perceptual (sentimental) discriminations, but it will not get us very far on its own. Practice and comparison are required to refine the natural capacity and give it the understanding of art that is required for judgements to be made free from prejudice. Such freedom from prejudice is also required to make just comparisons between works of art. Consequently, the processes of practice, comparison and freedom from prejudice all operate and develop together.

Regulating these and adding fine discriminations of its own is good/strong sense, which is required to take note of the subtle influences that may affect our perception of a work of art and thus lead us into an unwittingly prejudiced judgement.

## **Character and the Standard of Taste**

The five qualities listed in the specification of the true judge are intertwined to such an extent that describing them as five traits of her character is, at best, misleading. Once they are properly understood it is only the first that could possibly be held in isolation to any of the others,<sup>224</sup> but delicate sentiment understood as a natural capacity is no longer held by the time someone has become a true judge, since by then it has been “improved,” “perfected,” and “cleared” (ST 241) to become delicacy of taste. It is best to read the description of the true judge in ST as a character specification, which specifies a single, complex character, rather than as a

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<sup>223</sup> This is, of course, not the only possibility. They could have the effect of us regarding the actually inferior poem as far superior, perhaps because its simpler use of language is within our comprehension.

<sup>224</sup> Hume does imply that there could be someone “who has a just taste without a sound understanding.” (ST 241) But Hume’s comment is more of an afterthought than a serious consideration and the discussion I have given provides good reason for Hume to retract this comment.

list of five independent traits or virtues.

The character specification given of the true judge accords with the account of Hume's conception of character that I have built up in the first three chapters. The five qualities specified by Hume are elements of character. They are a combination of natural abilities, habits and general rules. It is a little surprising that there is so little mention of the passions in the context of the true judge. However, delicate sentiment is characterised as sensitivity in terms of calm passions, so they are not without a role. Moreover, the character specification provides a means of refining this original, uncultivated talent, so, although they never occupy centre stage, it is reasonable to consider the passions as being importantly present throughout.

A more interesting result is that the character of the true judge can be given a moral characterisation. In 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion' Hume suggests that "nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the cultivation of that higher and more refined taste, which enables us to judge of the characters of men, of compositions of genius, and of the productions of the nobler arts." (Essays 6) The explicit import of this in terms of the moral judge will be examined in Chapter Five, but there is a significant moral result from the analysis of the true judge given above. Cultivation of delicate sentiment to form delicacy of taste is the cultivation of a sensitivity to the calm passions. When this is combined with Hume's claim that delicacy of taste 'cures' us of delicacy of passion, it is clear that cultivating delicacy of taste will result in "the prevalence of the calm passions above the violent," which is Hume's definition of the moral virtue of strength of mind (T 2.3.3.10; 418). It would be hasty to suppose that developing delicacy of taste is the only means by which the calm passions may come to take precedence over the violent, in his discussion of strength of mind Hume does not make any explicit appeal to aesthetic education, but the remarks in 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion' suggest that it may be one way in which strength of mind could be achieved and the character specification of the true judge in ST fills out this promise by giving more explicit information as to how it could be achieved. Indeed, ST probably constitutes the longest account Hume ever gives of education of character. The only other obvious source on the education of character, 'The Sceptic', is similarly involved with



aesthetic questions. It is possible that had Hume ever written his promised book of the *Treatise* on criticism<sup>225</sup> he would have developed an account of aesthetic education of character that closely ties his aesthetics to his ethics.

Reading Hume's account of the true judge as a character specification provides some interesting avenues for answering some of the questions which have occupied commentators on ST. It has been observed at several points during the discussion that the five elements making up the character specification must be understood as matters of degree. James Shelley takes Hume's description of the five elements as 'perfections' as evidence in favour of his view that Hume intends the true judge to be ideal, since "perfections are qualities which are either possessed in full or not at all,"<sup>226</sup> but once the five elements are properly understood it is clear that this use of the word 'perfections' cannot be taken at face value. Practice and comparison, as Hume characterises them and otherwise, are not the sorts of thing that one can perfect; each is something of which one could always have more. The same can be said of Hume's peculiar version of freedom from prejudice. While the absence of something can be perfect, at least theoretically, freedom from prejudice as understanding the intended audience of a work of art is not so clearly something one could perfect. Even if it were granted conceivable that one might know everything the intended audience knows or could know, it is still not clear that this would be best described as a perfection. And this is to restrict the question to one work of art and one intended audience. If we expand the range to include all works of art and take account of the fact that it is not always clear who the intended audience is supposed to be, or that there is only one such audience for a particular work, there is less reason to see it as even conceivable that someone could have the knowledge required for freedom from prejudice. Being a member of one possible intended audience may precisely preclude one from being a member of others.<sup>227</sup> Similar claims can be made of good sense.

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<sup>225</sup> Referred to in the *Advertisement* to the *Treatise*, see above p. 26.

<sup>226</sup> Shelley, "Hume's Double Standard," 439.

<sup>227</sup> Such possibilities do not seem to have occurred to Hume, whose conception of art was somewhat limited, but it is surely in favour of reading freedom from prejudice as not being a perfection that it would allow Hume to account for these possibilities with only minimal modifications to his theory.

Hume requires a joint verdict of the true judges to allow for the fact that all true judges are going to be slightly different. The knowledge they have that comes through practice and comparison, constitutes freedom from prejudice and (to an extent) good sense, will differ slightly from one to another. It is therefore not the case that a true judge will give a correct verdict in every case. Presumably a true judge will need to be able to make judgements in a wide enough range of cases, but there may be areas in which he lacks sufficient practice/comparison. One way in which this is obviously the case is in the hypothetical possibility of a judge from the past being asked to judge a current work of art. Since by hypothesis he is precluded from having knowledge of any intervening movements in art he would likely be confounded by the new work. So, for example, a true judge who was well versed in the pioneering movement towards abstraction made by members of *Der Blaue Reiter* but who died in the First World War might have great difficulty comprehending post-Second World War abstract expressionist paintings if he were somehow brought back to life to judge them.

On this point my view is similar to that of Wieand (cited above p. 131), who also notes that a judge may make a mistake on any particular occasion. He does not, however, note Hume's acknowledgement of this very point: "[W]e must choose with care a proper time and place, and bring the fancy into a suitable situation and disposition. A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object; if any of these circumstances be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious." (ST 232) This comment comes before Hume explicitly considers the true judge, and so he does not develop the point in that context, but it is easy enough to extrapolate the point. We may further wish to add that the good sense of the true judge will be required to check that conditions are optimal for making judgements, such that a true judge will realise that the conditions are non-optimal or that she is not qualified to make a particular judgement. In such circumstances we hope a true judge would say something like, "I do not find this work pleasing, but the light is poor and I am not well versed in abstract expressionism." That such a view is attributable to Hume is further testified to by linking it back to his comments on character elsewhere:

The most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be

accounted for by those, who know every particular circumstance of their character and *situation*. A person of an obliging disposition gives a peevish answer: But he has the toothache, or has not dined. A stupid fellow discovers an uncommon alacrity in his carriage: But he has met with a sudden piece of good fortune. (EHU 8.15; 88, emphasis mine)

If we were to discover that our true judge's vicious dismissal of what we thought was a fine piece was delivered when she was suffering from toothache we would discount her judgement, and were someone we know to have a sentimental taste to say something insightful about a Goya masterpiece we would not immediately declare her to be a true judge.

There is nothing to guarantee that circumstantial factors will not interfere with any particular judgement of taste. The only thing available to guard against such circumstantial factors is an awareness that they are operating. Such an awareness is just what the true judge has. She has delicacy of taste, which involves a high degree of sensitivity to her surroundings. As a result she is more likely to note a strange colour to the light or that she is suffering from fatigue and hence more likely to withhold her judgement.<sup>228</sup> Hume therefore describes the true judge as being capable of judging "without danger of mistake." (ST 237) This is quite different from saying that a mistake is impossible. Provided I take care crossing the road, choosing to cross away from junctions and where there is good visibility, making allowances for speed and weight of traffic, weather conditions, amount of light, etc., I am not in danger of being run over, but it is still possible that I will be. Similarly, provided the true judge takes account of the conditions and the type of work she is called upon to judge her delicacy of taste will mean that there is no danger of her making a mistake, but such mistakes are still possible.

The possibility of a true judge being in error should not come as a surprise. On Hume's account, whether a work of art is beautiful or not is a matter of fact concerning its effect on a certain sort of observer. If this is the case then its contrary is always possible (EHU 4.2; 25 & T 1.3.7.3; 95) and therefore there is no guarantee

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<sup>228</sup> Whether our actual critics live up to the Humean picture as I am portraying it here would be an interesting question.

that it will not happen. Nonetheless there are things of which we are certain, despite being unable to give satisfactory reasons for our certainty, such as that the sun will rise tomorrow. Hume calls arguments which establish matters of fact as beyond doubt ‘proofs’:

By knowledge, I mean the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas. By proofs, those arguments, which are deriv’d from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence which is still attended with uncertainty. (T 1.3.11.2; 124)

The character specification of the true judge is such that any individual judge can make judgements without being in danger of mistake. Their joint verdict would constitute a Humean proof of the beauty of a particular work of art.<sup>229</sup>

This does not resolve a more complicated logical problem, raised by James Shelley: “If any true judge can be wrong in a particular case, it is in theory possible that all are wrong in that case, and if that is possible, their joint verdict cannot be the standard.”<sup>230</sup> In order for it to make sense to say, ‘All true judges are wrong,’ there must be a standard external to their joint verdict that establishes the wrongness of that verdict. But Hume is explicit that “the joint verdict of [true judges]... is the true standard of taste and beauty.” (ST 241) Shelley argues this makes Hume “committed to the view that a true judge can never be wrong. But no human being can never be wrong.”<sup>231</sup> Therefore, true judges are ideal.

As I argued above, the conditions under which a judgement is made can interfere with a correct judgement. If the true judge notices that conditions are non-optimal, she will either deliver a qualified judgement or withhold judgement altogether. In this case it is misleading to describe the true judge as being wrong, nor does she deliver a wrong judgement, since she does not deliver a judgement at all. However,

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<sup>229</sup> A possible parallel here is Hume’s argument against the existence of miracles, since it is the testimony of the judges which is at issue. In both cases Hume is attempting to derive a proof from testimony.

<sup>230</sup> Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard,” 438.

<sup>231</sup> Shelley, “Hume’s Double Standard,” 439.

there is a more interesting case in which the true judge fails to notice that conditions are non-optimal. The true judge, on my account, is *more likely* to notice non-optimal conditions, but she is not guaranteed to do so. Failure to notice non-optimal conditions is attributable to the true judge's character, but it does not impugn her character. True judges have an exceptional level of sensitivity, but they are not perfect. Therefore it is possible in this case for a true judge to deliver a judgement that is wrong.

Shelley's argument will proceed: if one true judge can fail to notice non-optimal conditions in a particular case, then all true judges can fail to notice non-optimal conditions in that case. In theory I have to concede that this is possible, but Hume's notion of proof is once again elucidatory. The joint verdict is a Humean proof of the beauty of a work of art. It thus establishes a matter of fact. We can therefore conceive of its contrary as a logical possibility. But this is only a possibility for us when we are thinking abstrusely and philosophically. When we are engaged in the practice of art criticism the possibility does not arise.<sup>232</sup> Given that the true judge will only deliver a wrong judgement if the viewing conditions are non-optimal by so small a degree as to be, even to her high level of sensitivity, indistinguishable from good conditions, the idea that this has happened in every case is incredible. There is no logical contradiction to the thought that Michelangelo's *David* is not a good sculpture, on the grounds that everyone qualified to judge who ever thought it was a good sculpture failed to notice that viewing conditions were not quite good enough for judging sculpture when they issued their judgements. Yet the suggestion is so implausible that this is not something we could believe to have happened. It is a practical impossibility. It is just as impossible for us to believe every true judge to have been wrong about *David* as it is for us to believe "a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean." (ST 231)

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<sup>232</sup> Wieand comments that the possibility that all true judges may be wrong is "too obvious for Hume to have overlooked" it. See Jeffrey Wieand, "Hume's True Judges," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (1995): 319. I think, on the contrary, that it is entirely possible that Hume overlooked it for the simple reason that in ST he is only considering practical possibilities. Hume's *Essays* do not contain abstruse, theoretical speculations.

Still Shelley's argument retains some bite, since he can still insist that a standard distinct from the true judges' joint verdict is required for it to be so much as intelligible that the joint verdict could be wrong. But if we include reference to good viewing conditions, however they are to be specified, in the requirements for a judgement, as well as the character of the true judge, then it is not clear that a separate standard is required. We can establish that a judgement is wrong (or at least that if it is right, it is right merely by chance) without having an independent standard against which to compare it by specifying the conditions that a judgement must meet for it to be satisfactory. We can specify that a judgement of taste has to be made by a true judge under good viewing conditions and thereby establish the wrongness of any judgements of taste delivered under poor viewing conditions without requiring a standard of taste independent of the true judges' joint verdict.<sup>233</sup> Shelley's argument fails to establish that the true judges must be ideal.

In this chapter I have argued that Hume's discussion of the true judge in 'Of the Standard of Taste' is to be understood as a character specification. The five qualities he specifies for the judge are not five separate, or even entirely separable, character traits, but different elements composing the character of the true judge, who can be summarised as possessing delicacy of taste. As such the true judge can be seen as a more complete example of the picture of character I built up in Chapters Two and Three. Such a reading of ST has offered answers to some of the questions discussed by the many commentators on the essay. In particular, understanding the five elements as being integrated together and as matters of degree has shown that the true judge is intended to be a real character for Hume, even if it is hard to find/agree on an actual example. It has also shed light on the possibility of finding a Humean proof to constitute the standard of taste through the joint verdict of such judges. In Chapter Five I will consider how the character of the moral judge relates to that of the true judge in aesthetics.

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<sup>233</sup> We may require some standards external to the judges' joint verdict to establish whether the viewing conditions are good, but these are not standards of taste.

# Chapter Five

## The Moral Judge

It is characters rather than actions that are the object of moral judgement on Hume's account. When we contemplate people's characters we feel the moral sentiments of approbation or disapprobation. Through such sentiments we become aware of the virtuousness or viciousness of the character under our consideration.

To have a sense of virtue, is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or admiration... We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. The case is the same as in our judgements concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is imply'd in the immediate pleasure they convey to us. (T 3.1.2.3; 471)

Hume explicitly likens moral judgement to aesthetic judgement. Both are matters of sentiment and in both cases it is the sentiment which constitutes the judgement: we feel that a character is virtuous, as we feel that a work of art is beautiful.

The similarity between Hume's accounts of aesthetic and moral judgement makes it natural to expect that the moral judge will take as prominent a role in his morals as the true judge does in his aesthetics, but Hume never gives a character specification for the moral judge. Such is the degree of similarity in structure between the accounts of moral and aesthetic judgement that it is appealing to look to the character specification of true judge in aesthetics as a template for the moral judge. In this chapter I will pursue this line of enquiry. As will become clear there are some complications with an attempt to link the two. One complication concerns the rarity of judges. Hume emphasises that "a true judge in the finer arts... [is] so rare a character." (Essays 241) While the rarity of the true judge is problematic for Hume's aesthetics it is, perhaps, a tolerable inconvenience. This is not the case when we consider moral judges. For moral judges to be similarly rare would present a pressing practical problem. However important we take aesthetic judgements to

be, there is not so much hanging on them as there is upon our moral ones, where questions arise concerning charity, trust, and justice. This could be taken as a corollary of the practical condition: moral judges cannot be so rare as to be virtually inaccessible. I will argue that this complication is attenuated by the ubiquitous opportunities for practice in moral judgement.

A second complication concerns the role of comparison in moral judgement. In the aesthetic case comparison is not problematic, but in the moral case we are inclined to compare the people we judge with ourselves. This gives rise to the passions of malice and envy, on Hume's account, which are clearly contrary to reliable moral judgements. I will argue that Hume's theory that moral judgements are made from general points of view can reduce the risk of these passions corrupting judgements. The ability to take up general points of view can be seen to echo the true judge's quality of freedom from prejudice. The moral judge's character is therefore very similar to the character of the true judge.

## **From True Judge to Moral Judge**

Moral judgements, like aesthetic judgements, are dependent upon the sentiments of the person making the judgement. In neither case does Hume hold that this makes judgements arbitrary, since in both cases the sentiment which grounds the judgement is causally dependent upon "the particular fabric and constitution of the human species." (EPM 1.3;170) To some extent Hume's claim here relies on his commitment to the uniformity of human nature,<sup>234</sup> but it is also a matter of the particular character of the spectator. He illustrates the point by considering how a "passionate lover" might "give... a character of his mistress." The lover will compare her to "a goddess or an angel." But of course this entitles one to "infer nothing... but that the poor man is in love... The same divine creature... to a different man, appears a mere mortal being, and is beheld with the utmost indifference." This may, at first, appear to go against the central point, but the difference between the passionate lover and the other man can be explained by an entirely general appeal to the "appetite between the sexes, which nature has infused

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<sup>234</sup> See above, p. 23.



into all animals.” (Essays 162) He proceeds to assert that “nature is more uniform in the sentiments of the mind than in most feelings of the body,” but that such uniformity does not prevent there being “a considerable diversity in the sentiments of beauty and worth, and that education, custom, prejudice, caprice, and humour, frequently vary our taste.” (Essays 163) Leaving ‘caprice’ aside, it is notable that this list aligns well with the list of elements of character outlined in Chapter Two: habits, general rules and natural abilities align with the other members of the list. Even caprice might be accommodated if we treat it as a reference to temper and the passions. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Hume’s appeal to the ‘fabric and constitution of the human species’ involves a combination of his commitment to the uniformity of human nature and to character.

This has already been shown in the aesthetic case in Chapter Four, where feeling the appropriate sentiment of beauty is dependent upon possessing delicacy of taste. Correctly perceiving a work of art is a case of perceiving any subtle “excellence or blemish” (Essays 236) in its composition. Just as works of art are complex objects, the characters being judged in moral cases are complex objects. As was argued in Chapter Three, Hume’s character sketches typically involve a complex of multiple different properties which cannot be disentangled. The characters are explained and justified through their being embedded in a particular life or way of life, the identification of which may involve intricate knowledge of the conventions of the society in which the person lives, knowledge of their particular passions and ongoing projects, and experience of human nature in general. Assessment of character is not a simple enterprise. Hume explicates this point in detail in the *Second Enquiry*:

The final sentence... which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable... depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species... But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained... [I]n many orders of beauty, particularly those of the finer arts, it is requisite to employ much reasoning, in order to feel the proper sentiment; and a false relish may frequently be corrected by argument and

reflection. There are just grounds to conclude, that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species, and demands the assistance of our intellectual faculties, in order to give it a suitable influence on the human mind. (EPM 1.9; 172-73)

Not only does Hume again explicitly associate the processes of aesthetic and moral judgement, but he here provides a list of the processes involved. This list emphasises reasoning in preparation for judgement, almost as though they are completely separate stages, with the conclusions of reasoning being drawn before sentiment arises. This is a part of the process on Hume's account, and he is correct: some facts must be 'fixed and ascertained' before we can be said to properly discern the object at all. But the inclusion of distinctions, comparisons and relations in the list indicates similarities with the character specification of the true judge in 'Of the Standard of Taste'. Making 'nice distinctions' and 'distant comparisons' is a matter of practice and, obviously, comparison. Some kind of delicacy of sentiment is implied, but here Hume implies that such delicacy is common. In 'Of the Standard of Taste', there is said to be "naturally a wide difference in point of delicacy [of sentiment] between one person and another." (Essays 237) The only mention of a comparable element in the *Enquiry* passage refers to 'some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal.' This is not exactly a contradiction: it is quite possible that the basic 'sense or feeling' is universal, but that its delicacy is not. The sense of smell is a (near) universal property of human beings, but it is more acute in some than in others.<sup>235</sup> Nonetheless, Hume never explicitly says that there is a natural distinction in terms of delicacy in the case of moral sentiments, which gives the impression that he thinks moral delicacy is far more universal than aesthetic delicacy. There is no independent justification for him thinking so.

Hume's apparent difference of opinion is even less justified if my contention in Chapter Four that delicacy of sentiment is a matter of sensitivity to the calm passions is correct (p. 133). Moral judgement is also concerned with calm passions,

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<sup>235</sup> This kind of account is implied in 'Of the Standard of Taste': "Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease; and if they fail of their effect in any particular instance, it is from some apparent defect or imperfection in the organ." (Essays 233)

so moral sensitivity and aesthetic sensitivity depend, at bottom, on the same kind of delicacy. Hume observes,

The persons introduced in tragedy and epic poetry, must be represented as reasoning, and thinking, and concluding, and acting, suitably to their character and circumstances; and without judgement, as well as taste and invention, a poet can never hope to succeed in so delicate an undertaking. (Essays 240)

Delicacy in aesthetic judgement is sometimes the same as delicacy in moral judgement. Whether someone's delicacy of sentiment is cultivated towards delicacy of taste in moral or aesthetic judgement depends upon the other influences on her character, but Hume should hold delicacy of sentiment to be either universal or variable in both morals and aesthetics, since it is the same delicacy in each case.

Whether delicacy of sentiment is common or not matters little, since even if it is a common possession the other stringencies placed upon the true judge will render her 'so rare a character'. The same will apply in the case of the moral judge; forming distant comparisons, drawing just conclusions, and examining complex relations are not easy tasks which can be carried out by anyone.

The rarity of the true judge is a problem for Hume's aesthetics. Immediately after declaring her 'so rare a character' Hume considers a collection of "embarrassing" questions: "But where are such critics to be found? By what marks are they to be known? How distinguish them from pretenders?" (Essays 241) Yet while this is admittedly an embarrassment for his aesthetics Hume is able to treat it somewhat casually. "It is sufficient for our present purpose," he declares, "if we have proved, that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing." (Essays 242) It is debatable whether or not such a casual dismissal of the problem is acceptable in the aesthetic case, but it is surely not so in the case of moral judgement, where so much may hang upon our decisions. If two people disagree about the culpability of a third for some crime then we do not merely want to know which is right: we *need* to know. If the person is culpable then punishment of some kind must be levelled, otherwise it must not be. It is therefore of vital importance that we are able to identify moral judges if Hume's theory is to be persuasive.

It might be tempting to think that there is a simple way to identify such judges built in to Hume's social philosophy. The conventions of society include the establishment of magistrates.<sup>236</sup> But Hume's discussion of magistrates does not appeal to their superior faculties of judgement. On the contrary, magistrates are established through convention as an expedient to allow for the enforcement and stability of promises. Even once promising has been established as a convention, Hume notes, "The consequences of every breach... seem to lie very remote," such that they, "are not able to counter-balance any immediate advantage." (T 3.2.7.3; 535) To prevent society collapsing from our "violent propensity to prefer contiguous to remote" we establish a new convention "to change our circumstance and situation, and render the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest, and their violation our most remote." This convention consists of "a few, whom we... immediately interest in the execution of justice," namely "civil magistrates." (T 3.2.7.6; 537) The tendency of the discussion is invariably concerned with the social situation of magistrates and their conventional role, not their particular character.<sup>237</sup> The authority of magistrates is in no way dependent upon their being peculiarly fitted for the job, i.e. their being excellent judges of character. On the contrary, "Time alone gives solidity to their right." (T 3.2.10.4; 556)<sup>238</sup> Moreover, magistrates are given the role in society of establishing rights to property, i.e. the enforcement of justice on Hume's account, and hence are central to the artificial virtues, but the moral judge is not only a judge with regards to the artificial virtues.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> See above, p. 104.

<sup>237</sup> Occupying the social position that they do will have a formative effect on their character, but there is no reason to think this will particularly improve their judgement any more than the lifestyle of soldiers necessarily improves their ability to conduct wars. See above, pp. 98, 119.

<sup>238</sup> I have simplified Hume's discussion, which appeals to other principles in the establishment of rulers and magistrates, including consent (T 3.2.10.2; 554) and even conquest (T 3.2.10.8; 558) among others.

<sup>239</sup> Baier develops an account of Hume's self and character which links it very closely to property, promises and the development of magistrates: the bundle of the self is coordinated by and reflects the heap of monetary possessions, which is what gives it durability. See Baier, "Heaps and Bundles," 292.

The potential rarity of moral judges raises practical problems that would not be resolved even if it were the case that they could be identified with magistrates. The practical condition requires that character can be knowable through relatively ordinary means and by ordinary people. Our reliance on judgements about the character of others is so ubiquitous that it is “almost impossible... to engage, either in science or action of any kind, without acknowledging... this *inference* from motives to voluntary actions; from characters to conduct.” (EHU 8.18; 90) The moral judge must not be such a rarefied figure that we cannot hope to at least approximate the judgements we make in the ordinary course of life to those that would be made by a moral judge. This is not to say that everyone is a moral judge – those designated moral judges are those to whom we may turn to resolve disputes – but there needs be a higher level of competence at making moral judgements in society than there is aesthetic judgements.<sup>240</sup> Hume describes the “sentiments of morality” as natural, in the sense which opposes ‘natural’ to “rare and unusual... since these never was any nation of the world, nor any single person in any nation, who was utterly depriv’d of them.” (T 3.1.2.8; 474)

### ***The Ubiquity of Practice***

One way in which it is possible to explain how a greater proportion of people at least approximate to the moral judge while holding onto the idea that the true judge can be used as a template is that practice in moral judgements is much easier to come by. Few people have the luxury or inclination to acquire practice in works of art, where the objects must be sought out and often with some difficulty and expense.<sup>241</sup> Acquiring practice in judging characters does not require seeking out

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<sup>240</sup> This is assuming that society is not endemically morally corrupt but aesthetically sophisticated.

<sup>241</sup> Richard Shusterman draws attention to this fact in his critique of Hume: “only the socio-economically privileged can set the standard of taste since only they have the access to the right objects and the time and education necessary to make taste ever more refined.” Shusterman’s criticisms are based on the idea that Hume falsely represents social determination of taste as a product of nature, but as I have argued at length in Chapter Four, Hume is quite openly committed to the theory that taste is a socially developed phenomenon. In this respect I am in agreement with Shelley, who argues, “Hume does not hold the taste of true judges to be particularly natural in any sense.” See Richard Shusterman, “Of the Scandal of Taste: Social Privilege as Nature in the

opportunities for practice. The regularity of our inferences from characters to actions that forms a central theme of Hume's discussions of free will, especially in the *First Enquiry*, was discussed in Chapter One (p. 23). Such experience is "acquired by long life and a variety of business and company." The variety of company available to a person may vary greatly according to their social position, but the acquisition of practice as far as their social experience extends is open to all:

Why is the aged husbandman more skilful in his calling than the young beginner but because there is a certain uniformity in the operation of the sun, rain, and earth towards the production of vegetables; and experience teaches the old practitioner the rules by which this operation is governed and directed? (EHU 8.9; 84-5)

The husbandman's experience comes from long life rather than variety of company, but there is nothing to prevent that experience being broadened, "In proportion as men extend their dealings." (EHU 8.17; 89) While this may take the form of deliberately seeking out practice, it need not take that form. And as someone's range of dealings is extended, she gains knowledge and experience of a variety of different situations and social conventions. It is in the context of such conventions that characters are both formed and revealed.<sup>242</sup> Conventions are a matter of public agreement, so knowledge of them is publicly available. Characters can therefore be discussed, and such discussion will include pointing out the virtues and vices of particular individuals. In 'Of the Standard of Taste' Hume observes, "Many men, when left to themselves, have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty, who are yet capable of relishing any fine stroke, which is pointed out to them. Every convert to the admiration of the real poet or orator is the cause of some new conversion." (Essays 243) The standard of taste in aesthetics is self-reinforcing. Once people are acquainted with the beauties of a particular poet or painter they are able to point them out to others, despite the fact that they are not actually true judges. The moral case will be similar, except that there are so many more examples and hence so many more instances of things being pointed out. Practice is thus reinforced.

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Aesthetic Theories of Hume and Kant," *Philosophical Forum* 20, no. 3 (1989): 218, and James Shelley, "Hume and the Nature of Taste," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 1 (1998): 31.

<sup>242</sup> See above, p. 107.

Hume details one way in which such reinforcement might take place in his essay ‘Of the Study of History’. He suggests that through the study of history we are able to extend “our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute to our improvement in wisdom, as if they had actually laid under our observation.” (Essays 566-67) Not only that, but when we examine history we find people “appearing in their true colours, without any of those disguises, which, during their life-time, so much perplexed the judgement of the beholders.” (Essays 566) Hume is implying that history can offer a certain amount of moral instruction, by providing us with examples, i.e. practice, beyond our direct experience. This extension of our experience is not one that requires any special aptitude: “[T]he study of history... [is] well suited... to every one, but particularly to those who are debarred the severer studies, by... the weakness of their education.” (Essays 565)<sup>243</sup>

### ***Complexities of Comparison***

Comparison is, at first glimpse, similarly unproblematic. In the same way as we are given such a wealth of practice we have ample opportunities to make comparisons between people in moral cases. Indeed, it seems central to the idea of acquiring knowledge through practice that we make comparisons between cases. The husbandman compares the weather of one year to that of another year and learns which crops grow better in wet conditions and which in dry. In the aesthetic case, practice and comparison were discussed together as two aspects of the same phenomenon (p. 134). If the true judge is to serve as a template for the moral judge, comparison will also be an important element of the latter’s character.

Hume’s discussions of comparison in moral cases render any attempt to transfer the

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<sup>243</sup> The essay is originally written as a recommendation to his “female readers” (Essays 563), but the general point that Hume thinks history is accessible to those of limited education and natural abilities can safely be divorced from the essay’s eighteenth-century prejudices against women. As Baier argues, this essay and other similar remarks can be regarded as a “harmless... display of his social realism,” rather than a pernicious sexism, when seen in the context of Hume’s overall moral position, which is, on Baier’s account, far more conducive to the moral attitudes of women than Kantian approaches. See Annette C. Baier, “Hume, the Women’s Moral Theorist?” in *David Hume: Critical Assessments*, 6 vols., ed. Stanley Tweyman, vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1995): 220.

element from the one to the other problematic, because comparison is the source of the passions of malice and envy.

'Tis evident we must receive a greater or less satisfaction of uneasiness from reflecting on our own condition and circumstances, in proportion as they appear more or less fortunate or unhappy, in proportion to the degrees of riches, and power, and merit, and reputation, which we think ourselves possess of...

[A]ccording as we observe a greater or less share of happiness or misery in others, we must make an estimate of our own, and feel a consequent pain or pleasure. The misery of another gives us a more lively idea of our own happiness, and his happiness of our misery. The former, therefore, produces delight; and the latter uneasiness. (T 2.2.8.8; 375)

This reasoning will account for the origin of *envy* as well as of malice... [E]nvy is excited by some present enjoyment of another, which by comparison diminishes our idea of our own: Whereas malice is the unprovok'd desire of producing evil to another, in order to reap a pleasure by the comparison. (T 2.2.8.12; 377)

The phenomenon to which Hume is referring is quite familiar. Consider someone who is quite satisfied with her three bedroom, semi-detached house in a reasonable area of town. Her satisfaction is ruined when she discovers that her colleague lives in a beautiful, four bedroom, detached house in the most desirable area of town. Now, instead of taking satisfaction from her house, she feels envy towards her colleague, who in turn boasts of her own superior house in order to 'reap a pleasure by the comparison'.

Comparison, in this sense, is between oneself and another, or some group of others. This makes it different from the kind of comparison that was considered in the aesthetic case, where the comparison was made between two different works of art. What we require in the moral case is the same kind of comparison, that between two others, and Hume does not deny that we are able to make such comparisons. However, whenever we are considering someone in moral judgement we are considering someone with whom we share certain properties, or, in more Humean terms, someone whom we resemble. It is this detail that allows for the possibility of comparison. "In a word, no ideas can affect each other, either by comparison, or by the passions they separately produce, unless they be united together by some relation." (T 2.2.8.20; 380) We do not, by and large, share properties with works of



art, so we are not tempted to make comparisons between works of art and ourselves. The problem therefore does not arise in the aesthetic case.<sup>244</sup> But in the moral case the problem looms large. “[N]o comparison is more obvious than that with ourselves; and hence it is that on all occasions it takes place, and mixes with most of our passions.” (T 3.3.2.4; 593) Our tendency to make comparisons is described by Hume as “an *original* quality of the soul.” (T 2.2.8.2; 372) And original qualities “are such as are most inseparable from the soul, and can be resolv’d into no other.” (T 2.1.3.3; 280) The temptation to compare ourselves with others is unavoidable and virtually irresistible.

This is doubly problematic for the character of the moral judge. First, it is reasonable to expect that a moral judge must meet a certain moral standard herself. The passions of malice and envy are not passions to which we aspire.<sup>245</sup> If the character of the moral judge was such as to encourage its own moral corruption through the increased tendency of the moral judge to make comparisons and hence to increase the passions of malice and envy, then it would be inherently flawed and unstable. Like the true judge, the moral judge must be able to judge ‘without danger of mistake’; this cannot be said of any character which is inherently flawed and unstable. Second, even if the moral judge was somehow able to resist the corruption of her character by malice and envy, they would still affect her judgement. Moral judges are supposed to be free of bias, but if they are making comparisons between themselves and the people they are judging then their judgements will be endemically biased.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> We might be inclined to compare ourselves with characters in a drama, or perhaps compare ourselves physically with statues or paintings, but this is not the same as comparing ourselves to the works of art themselves.

<sup>245</sup> This is not to say that they are all bad. They are likely to work against social cohesion, which is valued very highly by Hume, but he is careful to include the more negative passions in his conception of human nature (T 3.3.3.7; 605).

<sup>246</sup> The argument of the preceding three paragraphs concerning the difference of comparison in aesthetic and moral cases is derived from Jane McIntyre and Mary Mothersill, “Questions Concerning Character and Taste” (paper presented at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Hume Society Conference, Koblenz, Germany, August 7-10, 2006).

But comparison does not have only negative effects. Comparisons are essential for pride, which Hume regards in a more positive light. According to Hume's conception of pride, as with all the indirect passions, there is required a "double relation of ideas and impressions." (T 2.1.5.5; 286) This double relation consists in our having an idea of the cause of the passion and an idea of the object of the passion, as well as an impression of pleasure from the cause of the passion and an impression of pleasure, which is the sensation of the passion. The ideas are related insofar as the cause of pride is something "ally'd or related to us," (T 2.1.2.5; 279) while the object of pride "is self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness."<sup>247</sup> (T 2.1.2.2; 277) The impressions are related through resemblance: both are a type of pleasure.

Hume illustrates this through the example of a beautiful house. As the house is beautiful it gives rise to pleasure in anyone contemplating it, but "consider'd merely as such... never produces any pride or vanity." (T 2.1.2.6; 279) If, however, the house is owned by the person contemplating it, or is a house "which he has himself built and contriv'd," (T 2.1.2.6; 279) then pride can arise. The idea of the house is no longer that of the house alone, but of *my* house. This idea is related to the idea produced by pride: its object, self. "Here then is a passion plac'd betwixt two ideas, of which one produces it [the idea of *my* house], and the other is produc'd by it [the idea of self]." (T 2.1.2.4; 278) There is a second relation involved, in that the house is beautiful. The pleasure of a beautiful house can be felt by anyone who contemplates it, but if pride is produced then there is another pleasure: that of pride itself, the contemplation of oneself with pleasure. The two relations "very much assist and forward each other," with the result that the "new passion," i.e. pride, "must arise with so much greater violence, and the transition to it must be render'd so much more easy and natural." (T 2.1.4.4; 284)

Hume devotes considerable space to discussing the different causes of pride, many of which are involved with society.<sup>248</sup> He also mentions the importance of

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<sup>247</sup> Neither simplicity nor identity is implied by this wording.

<sup>248</sup> To mention just the causes of pride that appear in section titles: virtue, beauty, external advantages (by which Hume means anything good which is closely related to us, including our

comparison:

[T]he agreeable or disagreeable object [must] be not only closely related, but also peculiar to ourselves, or at least common to us with a few persons. 'Tis a quality observable in human nature... that every thing, which is often presented, and to which we have been long accustom'd, loses its value in our eyes, and is in a little time despis'd and neglected. We likewise judge of objects more from comparison than from their real and intrinsic merit; and where we cannot by some contrast enhance their value, we are apt to overlook even what is essentially good in them. (T 2.1.6.4; 291)

The language Hume uses here is nigh on identical to that which he uses in the discussion of malice and envy; the principle of comparison he is invoking is the same. Here it is given a more positive spin, since pride is not merely a pleasure, but a necessary pleasure, according to Hume: "[S]elf-satisfaction and vanity may not only be allowable, but requisite in a character." (T 3.3.2.10; 597) This is because pride gives us confidence and confidence is necessary for any great undertaking. As such, pride is useful and for something in ourselves to be useful is for it to be a virtue:

The utility and advantage of any quality to ourselves is a source of virtue, as well as its agreeableness to others; and 'tis certain, that nothing is more useful to us in the conduct of life, than a due degree of pride, which makes us sensible of our own merit, and gives us a confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprizes. (T 3.3.2.8; 596-97)

Amélie Rorty emphasises Hume's remark that pride *produces* the idea of self (T 2.1.2.4; 278). She argues, "It is a brute fact that pride... produces the idea of the self, the self *as* owner of a fine ancestral house, *as* mother of a fine young man."<sup>249</sup> Rorty's view is that pride, on Hume's account, is productive of the sense of self, as something in which we take concern. The idea of self produced by pride is that of self "as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves." (T 1.4.6.5;

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relations, nationality or region, etc.), property, riches, and fame. For a long list of causes of pride, see T 2.1.2.5; 278-79.

<sup>249</sup> Amélie O. Rorty, "'Pride Produces the Idea of Self': Hume on Moral Agency," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 3 (1990): 258.

253) As I argued in Chapter One (p. 18), there are reasons for distinguishing between this conception of self and character. Not least among these reasons is that our character is something in which we take concern. It is also something in which we may take pride, especially insofar as we are virtuous. But here there is a link between the two: pride, by producing a sense of self as something in which we take concern, gives us a concern for our character both as something we possess and as something that determines our social identity. As Rorty puts it, “[T]he sources of pride are visible and shining, admired and prized by others... Social comparison and social value influence the construction of the fictional idea of the self because they set conditions on the objects that cause pride.”<sup>250</sup>

Pride causes us to have concern for our characters, which is required for us to maintain and improve them.<sup>251</sup> An essential part of this process is the comparisons we make, as we only take pride in things ‘peculiar to ourselves, or at least common to us with a few persons.’ Comparison does not only give rise to malice and envy, which threaten corruption of character and judgements, but also to pride, which maintains and improves character, including that of the moral judge.

Why does comparison sometimes lead to malice and envy, but at other times lead to pride? Although Hume does not address this question directly, there are indications of how this question may be answered. Hume distinguishes between the cause and the object of pride. The object of pride is invariably self, on his account, but the causes are of a “prodigious number.” (T 2.1.3.5; 281) It is the causes that must be ‘peculiar to ourselves’, but this does not require that we make a comparison with someone in particular, rather we compare with society in general. Someone is proud of her house because it is more beautiful, better situated, or just larger than most houses in the region. Malice and envy, on the other hand, are far more specific. They are cognates of hatred, in Hume’s taxonomy. Hatred has the same structure as pride, but its object is “some other person.” (T 2.2.1.2; 329) Like pride, its cause are

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<sup>250</sup> Rorty, “Pride Produces Self,” 261.

<sup>251</sup> The converse is also true: “[P]ride requires certain causes to excite it, and languishes when unsupported by some excellency in the character, in bodily accomplishments, in cloaths, equipage or fortune.” (T 2.1.5.7; 288)

“very much diversify’d.” (T 2.2.1.4; 330) But since the object of malice and envy is always some other person, the comparison made must be more specific. The comparison is still made between the causes, but as malice and envy are not felt with relation to society in general but towards a specific person, or group of people, the comparison is made with that person’s specific situation or properties. Someone is not envious of people with larger houses in general, but of the larger house of her colleague in particular.

Closely related to the specificity of malice and envy is another limitation on these passions: there must be a relation between the person making the comparison and the person who is the object of the passion. Further, this relation must be neither too close nor too remote. If the relation is too close then the operation of sympathy overcomes the force of the comparison; if the relation is too remote then the comparison lacks the force for the passion of malice or envy to arise. Hume illustrates this by considering himself as stood on the shore watching “a ship at a distance, tost by a tempest, and in danger every moment of perishing.” In such a situation he would, he claims, be sensible of his own happiness at being safe on the shore. But this pleasure would not be maintained if he were close enough to

perceive distinctly the horror, painted on the countenance of the seamen and passengers, hear their lamentable cries, see the dearest friends give their last adieu, or embrace with a resolution to perish in each other’s arms: No man has so savage a heart as to reap any pleasure from such a spectacle.

He concludes that “there is a medium in this case... if the idea be too faint, it has no influence by comparison; and on the other hand, if it be too strong, it operates on us entirely by sympathy.” (T 3.3.2.5; 594-95)

The proximity requirement does not only apply to spatial relations. It applies to whatever relation there is between the person making the comparison and the object of comparison. This includes the relationships in which people stand to one another in society. This suggests that social conventions can play a part in controlling the conditions under which malice and envy arise. Hume makes a few suggestive remarks in this direction. He observes, “A common soldier bears no such envy to his general as to his sergeant or corporal.” (T 2.2.8.13; 378) The range of malice

and envy can therefore be restricted by conventions which establish the relations in which people stand to one another. Conventions such as military rank also establish the “deferences and mutual submissions, which custom requires of the different ranks of men towards each other.” (T 3.3.2.11; 598)<sup>252</sup> These ‘deferences and mutual submissions’ are introduced by Hume as regulating the expression of pride. “[A]ll direct expressions of this passion are condemn’d; nor do we make any exception to this rule in favour of men of sense and merit.” (T 3.3.2.10; 598) The direct expression of pride is condemned because of the bad feeling it produces in others:

[W]hen a man, whom we are really perswaded to be of inferior merit, is presented to us; if we observe in him any extraordinary degree of pride and self-conceit; the firm perswasion he has of his own merit, takes hold of the imagination, and diminishes us in our own eyes. (T 3.3.2.6; 595)<sup>253</sup>

Hume’s example here is not all that convincing, but it can easily be amended. If we are *really* persuaded the man is of inferior merit then we will just dismiss his pride as misplaced; it will be comical. What is required is not a man who is of inferior merit, but a man who is merely average. If that is the case then his pride will grate on us, especially if he manages to convince others of his exaggerated abilities. This case is different from that of malice and envy, but it is very closely related. Malice is served most easily by pointing out to someone how poor their abilities or condition are compared to one’s own; nothing serves more to increase envy than boasting. The conventions regulating the expression of pride also help to limit malice and envy.

How does all this bear on the character of the moral judge? First, it is possible to observe that the moral judge will feel pride, in her judgement if nothing else, but that this does not imply any defect in her character. We have conventions which regulate the expression of that pride to prevent it becoming objectionable to others. Provided the moral judge keeps her pride well concealed it will help her character. The main problem, however, is that of malice or envy interfering with the moral

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<sup>252</sup> The full passage is quoted in Chapter Three (p. 106).

<sup>253</sup> This was briefly discussed in Chapter Two (p. 51).

judge's character. This can be limited by certain conventions, which alter the relations between people such that they are no longer in a position to feel the effects of comparison, either because sympathy has become too strong, or because the relation is too remote. The conventions discussed above do not suffice to solve this problem. They limit the range of comparison, but they do not eliminate it altogether. Nor is there any specific reference to the moral judge, or even to moral judgement.

While Hume does not explicitly discuss this problem, he does raise a similar one, in which personal interest can run counter to the moral judgements we ought to make. "It seldom happens, that we do not think an enemy vicious, and can distinguish betwixt his opposition to our interest and real villainy or baseness." But he continues, "But this hinders not, but that the sentiments are, in themselves distinct; and a *man of temper and judgement* may preserve himself from these illusions." (T 3.1.2.4; 472, emphasis mine) Here Hume throws us back again towards the moral judge as being unusual, if not rare. The 'man of temper and judgement' is clearly unusual, since it only 'seldom happens' that we are able to distinguish between the enemy's antagonism to ourselves and his genuine qualities. Holding the two sentiments apart requires that they differ in feeling:

Sentiments must touch the heart, to make them controul our passions: But they need not extend beyond the imagination, to make them influence our taste. When a building seems clumsy and tottering to the eye, it is ugly and disagreeable; tho' we be fully assur'd of the solidity of the workmanship...<sup>254</sup> The *seeming tendencies* of objects affect the mind: And the emotions they excite are of a like species with those, which proceed from the *real consequences* of objects, but their feeling is different. Nay, these emotions are so different in their feeling, that they may often be contrary, without destroying each other... The imagination adheres to the

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<sup>254</sup> Given my general aim here of showing that the true judge of aesthetics can serve as a template for the moral judge, it is appropriate to draw attention to the fact that Hume once again uses aesthetic analogies. The tower in this passage is suggested to be 'ugly and disagreeable' to the eye. Similarly, Hume fleshes out the example of the enemy's good qualities by observing, "tho' 'tis certain a musical voice is nothing but one that naturally gives a *particular* kind of pleasure; yet 'tis difficult for a man to be sensible, that the voice of an enemy is agreeable, or to allow it to be musical." (T 3.1.2.4; 472) That Hume's example is quite comical – we do not normally even consider whether or not our enemy can sing – is itself quite telling of how similar he sees the kinds of judgements to be.

*general* views of things, and distinguishes betwixt the feelings they produce, and those which arise from our particular and momentary situation. (T 3.3.1.23; 586-87)

We experience two different passions, which are so different that they may coexist without mingling or uniting (cf. T 2.3.4.2; 420 and above p. 76). The difference is explained in that one originates in the imagination, rather than through our being presented with the ‘real consequences’. This is, in turn, explained by the imagination taking only a ‘general view of things’.

Hume does not introduce taking such a general view explicitly as a solution to the problem of envy and malice, but it does offer a solution to that problem. By taking a general view we keep ourselves at an imaginative distance from the object of judgement. Any sentiment that arises from such a general view is distinguishable from envy and malice, which are passions that arise only when we compare others with ourselves. Hume insists that the two sentiments are so different in feeling that they do not destroy each other. So in the case of the enemy, we feel the passion of hatred towards him, simply because he is our enemy, but it is also possible to view his character in general, imaginatively, and so feel a different kind of sentiment towards him, one which is appreciative of his good qualities. As will become clear in the next section, taking up a general point of view is a matter of convention.

One way in which it is possible to regard such an imaginative exercise is to consider it as a parallel to the freedom from prejudice requirement upon the true judge in aesthetics. Indeed, Hume appears to make the same claim with respect to aesthetic judgement: “[W]hen any work is addressed to the public, though I should have a friendship or enmity with the author, I must depart from this situation; and considering myself as a man in general, forget, if possible, my individual being and my peculiar circumstances.” (Essays 239) Yet there is a significant difference between the two cases. In the aesthetic case it is necessary to consider the work of art from the specific perspective of the intended audience.<sup>255</sup> Moral character is not a performance for an audience and, though it is intimately related to the performance of a variety of different actions and projects, this use of the word

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<sup>255</sup> See above, p. 138.



‘performance’ is quite different from the one that applies in the case of aesthetic performances. It may be considered a defect in someone’s character that they *perform* actions in the aesthetic sense of ‘perform’, i.e. that they act in a certain way merely in order to be seen so acting. Most obviously, actions performed specifically to be viewed by a particular audience (and perhaps not by a different audience) may constitute hypocrisy.<sup>256</sup> It is, then, not appropriate to transfer the freedom from prejudice requirement from the true judge to the moral judge. However, it is echoed in the case of moral judgements by the general point of view. In order to see the differences that this makes, it is necessary to consider in more detail Hume’s account of taking the general view in the moral case.

## The General Point of View

Hume introduces the notion that we need to take up “*steady* and *general* points of view” (T 3.3.1.15; 581-82) with the explicit purpose of solving two problems that arise from the centrality of sympathy in his model of moral judgement: the variability of sympathy and “virtue in rags” (T 3.3.1.10; 584). Moral judgement depends upon the sympathy we have with people who are affected by the character of the person whom we are judging. As Geoffrey Sayre-McCord succinctly summarises the theory: “The virtues secure our approbation because, on the one hand, virtues are traits that are either useful or agreeable to someone or other, and, on the other hand, we are moved by sympathy to take pleasure in our idea of others’ benefit without regard to their connection to us.”<sup>257</sup> But the intensity of the feelings produced by sympathy depends very much upon our proximity with the persons involved, while our moral judgements do not so vary:

We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners. But notwithstanding this variation of our sympathy, we give the

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<sup>256</sup> Hume is somewhat ambivalent on the viciousness of hypocrisy. See Baier’s discussion in “Hume’s Excellent Hypocrites,” in her *Death & Character*, 35-57. The same themes are taken up in the following two essays of that book.

<sup>257</sup> Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “On Why Hume’s ‘General Point of View’ Isn’t Ideal – And Shouldn’t Be,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 11, no. 1 (1994): 206.

same approbation to the same moral qualities in *China* as in *England*. (T 3.3.1.14; 581)

This is of a piece with the example of a personal enemy, whose good qualities we find it hard to appreciate. In that case sympathy receives little attention, since the enemy is our own enemy we need not sympathise with anyone to feel hatred. However, if the enemy is not our own but the enemy of a friend, sympathy looms larger. We sympathize with the friend and so come to hate the enemy, making it difficult for us to appreciate his good qualities.<sup>258</sup> The discussion given above therefore also applies in this case. A good moral judge, a ‘man of temper and judgement’, is capable of separating personally situated sentiments of hatred from a general appreciation of the enemy’s good qualities.

Hume argues that this can be done by considering only “the influence of characters and qualities, upon those who have an intercourse with any person,” when we make our judgements. In so doing, “We consider not whether the persons, affected with the qualities, be our acquaintance or strangers, countrymen or foreigners. Nay, we over-look our own interest in those general judgments.” (T 3.3.1.17; 582) This account of the general point of view is somewhat loose. Hume refines the point near the end of the section:

’Tis impossible men cou’d ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them. Now in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, whose character is examin’d; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him. (T 3.3.1.30; 591)

Taking up a general point of view<sup>259</sup> is not to take up an abstract, disembodied

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<sup>258</sup> The problem of sympathy is obviously a counterpart to the problem of comparison, since the differences introduced are differences on the basis of the proximity of the judge to the object of his judgement, which is exactly the difference between the conditions in which we sympathize and those in which we compare.

<sup>259</sup> Hume’s terminology varies. His first expression, ‘steady and general points of view,’ is plural. Such plurality is repeated, although somewhat ambiguously, at 3.3.1.23; 587, where Hume says, “The imagination adheres to the *general* views of things.” But in the passage just quoted the expression, ‘some common point of view,’ is notably singular. In the second *Enquiry* the expression

viewpoint. On the contrary, this picture of the general point of view suggests that it is actually quite intimate. The suggestion is backed up further by Hume's later shorthand for the perspective he outlines here as a "narrow circle" (T 3.3.3.2; 602).<sup>260</sup>

Given the centrality of sympathy in Hume's account this is just the kind of account we should expect. Unless we take up an intimate perspective we should not feel the effects of sympathy. What we are required to overlook is the specific details of our relationship to the person, but otherwise the perspective is intimate. Since this is only done in the imagination the felt emotion will not be as strong as those which arise from genuine encounters, nor will it be violent, as our own personal interest is left out. It will therefore be a weak, calm passion. The weakness I am assigning to sentiments arising from taking a general point of view raises a problem: how are such sentiments able to motivate action if they are weak? Those sentiments and passions that arise from our personal interest are (typically) strong and violent, so will inevitably prevail over the moral sentiments, making them otiose.

Giving a full account of the solution to this problem would take up too much space here, but some suggestive remarks as to how such a problem can be solved are required. Hume holds that where two passions resemble one another they can combine together. By combining together they form a stronger passion. Now all moral sentiments are acquired by taking up a general point of view. In this respect they resemble one another:

[U]nder the term *pleasure*, we comprehend sensations, which are very different from each other... 'Tis only when a character is consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil." (T 3.1.2.4; 472)

The moral sentiments thus reinforce one another, such that their compound becomes

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is normally this latter, singular version (EPM 9.6; 272). For reasons that will be given shortly, I have used the plural version.

<sup>260</sup> Here I am in agreement with Rachel Cohon: "The common point of view is not a detached perspective... It gives us not a wide panorama, but an intimate glimpse." Rachel Cohon, *Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 144.

a strong, calm passion,<sup>261</sup> and Hume is explicit that a strong, calm passion is able to overcome a weak, violent passion. “Men often counter-act a violent passion in prosecution of their interests and designs.” (T 2.3.3.10; 418) “We must, therefore, distinguish betwixt a calm and a weak passion; betwixt a violent and a strong one.” (T 2.3.4.1; 419)<sup>262</sup> An alternative way of viewing this phenomenon would be in terms of custom. The repetition of experience involved in taking up general points of view has the effect of strengthening the passion (T 2.3.5.1; 422 & T 2.3.5.5; 424).

The association of the moral sentiments with custom is made in an interestingly different way in the *Second Enquiry*:

Custom soon reconciles us to heights and precipices, and wears off these false and delusive terrors.<sup>263</sup> The reverse is observable in the estimates, which we form of characters and manners; and the more we habituate ourselves to an accurate scrutiny of morals, the more delicate feeling do we acquire of the most minute distinctions between vice and virtue. Such frequent occasion, indeed, have we, in common life, to pronounce all kinds of moral determinations, that no object of this kind can be new or unusual to us; nor could any *false* views or prepossessions maintain their ground against an experience, so common and familiar. (EPM 5.14; 217-18)

In this one short remark Hume invokes delicacy, practice and the force of custom in

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<sup>261</sup> The way in which passions can compound was discussed in Chapter Two (p. 76). See also T 2.2.8.4; 373-74, where Hume discusses how “every unite [unit] of number has a separate emotion attending it... by its conjunction with others... it contributes to the production of admiration.”

<sup>262</sup> Although there is a change of section here, these points are made in consecutive paragraphs.

<sup>263</sup> Hume uses an example which appears to be the same as one he uses in the discussion of general rules in the *Treatise*, but he comes to a quite different conclusion (see T 1.3.13.10; 148, which I discussed in Chapter Two (p. 72)). The example is different, however. In the *Treatise* the man is hung over a precipice in an iron cage and it is his belief in the solidity of iron that combats, or rather fails to combat, the general rule that he is at risk of falling. In the *Enquiry* Hume is considering someone who has repeated experience of cliffs and precipices, e.g. a mountaineer or a builder accustomed to working on a high scaffold, and consequently no longer fears falling. The fact that Hume uses the same example with a different twist is therefore interesting, but does not indicate any profound philosophical change of heart.

reinforcing moral sentiments, to the point that they become inexorable. Moreover, although this passage occurs in the section ‘Why Utility Pleases’ and Hume does not come to a full discussion of the common point of view for a further four sections, the preceding discussion includes references to our capacity to admire the good qualities of enemies (EPM 5.8 & 5.11; 216-17), a “general affection for virtue” (EPM 5.9; 216), and our approval of characters “in very distant ages and remote countries” or without knowing “in what age or country the person lived” (EPM 5.7 & 5.10; 215-16). The most direct reference to general points of view comes in the following paragraph:

Usefulness is agreeable, and engages our approbation... But, *useful*? For what? For some body’s interest, surely. Whose interest then? Not our own only: For our approbation frequently extends farther. It must, therefore, be the interest of those, who are served by the character or action approved of. (EPM 5.15; 218)

Another possible source for the reinforcement of the apparently weak moral sentiment is suggested by Hume’s account of sympathy.<sup>264</sup> The resemblance that is exhibited amongst our own ideas is also something that can be held in common with others. Passions that are shared can be reinforced through the effects of sympathy. “The passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce corresponding movements in all human hearts.” (T 3.3.3.5; 605) This is not sufficient. Since the moral sentiments are a species of calm passion they are apt to be swamped by our sympathetic responses to the violent passions of others. But the very feature highlighted above, the resemblance between all moral sentiments, can explain how sympathy can be helpful here. This point has been made recently by Jane McIntyre:

The features... of the disinterested perspective of morality that make *its* sentiments calm also allow those sentiments to be widely shared. Constancy and universality matter because they lay the foundation for sympathy to act to increase the strength of those calm passions... [From this perspective] many persons share the same sentiment: this fact is communicated to each of us through sympathy, thus

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<sup>264</sup> This second strategy does have the appealing feature of using an argument from sympathy to resolve the problems caused by the variability of sympathy.

strengthening morality's calm sentiments without making them more violent.<sup>265</sup>

These remarks indicate some ways in which it is possible to explain how the weakness of the sentiments arising from general points of view may be reinforced through the resources of Hume's theory of the passions and sympathy. I have certainly not developed such accounts to their full potential, nor have I considered objections that may be made to them. But such a defence would be tangential to my argument here, which concerns the possibility of using the true judge as a template for the moral judge. For the purposes of that argument it has been shown that Hume's suggestion that we take up general points of view in order to make moral judgements can be seen to echo the freedom from prejudice requirement on the true judge. In moral judgement we take up a general point of view, characterised as being that 'of the person himself, whose character is examin'd; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him'. This is not the same as to take up the position of a work of art's intended audience, but it is to select a perspective as the most appropriate for making a judgement. However, this model of taking general points of view is only part of the story. There is still the second problem for Hume's account of moral sentiments to consider: virtue in rags.

### ***Virtue in Rags***

In response to the problem of the variability of sympathy, Hume suggests that taking up general points of view involves sympathising with the actual effects of characters on their possessors and their narrow circles. But what about cases in which circumstances conspire against someone's character such that actual effects are somehow thwarted? This is the case that Hume considers when he discusses the possibility of 'virtue in rags'.

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<sup>265</sup> McIntyre, "Strength of Mind," 399-400. McIntyre's close association of such a capacity with strength of mind brings with it additional problems. In order for the sympathy account to work the moral sentiments must be widespread in society, in which case their common reinforcement will operate with more or less the same efficacy on everyone. But, presumably, not everyone possesses strength of mind. For another defence of the sympathy view, see Jane L. McIntyre, "Hume's Passions: Direct and Indirect," *Hume Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 83-85, and Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 152.

Where a person is possess'd of a character, that in its natural tendency is beneficial to society, we esteem him virtuous, and are delighted with the view of his character, even tho' particular accidents prevent its operation, and incapacitate him from being serviceable to his friends and country. Virtue in rags is still virtue; and the love, which it procures, attends a man into a dungeon or desert, where the virtue can no longer be exerted in action, and is lost to all the world. (T 3.3.1.19; 584)

Considering the narrow circle of the person being judged here does not help: he is 'incapacitated from being serviceable to his friends and country', i.e. his narrow circle. Yet we still consider him to be virtuous.

The explanation Hume gives is in terms of the *tendency* of the character, rather than its actual effects.<sup>266</sup> Once again, Hume makes analogies with aesthetic cases:

[W]here any object... is fitted to attain any agreeable end, it naturally gives pleasure, and is esteem'd beautiful, even tho' some external circumstances be wanting to render it altogether effectual... A house, that is contriv'd with great judgement for all the commodities of life, pleases us upon that account; tho' perhaps we are sensible, that no one will ever dwell in it. (T 3.3.1.20; 584)<sup>267</sup>

In the same way,

Where a character is, in every respect, fitted to be beneficial to society, the imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, without considering that there are still some circumstances wanting to render the cause a compleat one. *General rules* create a species of probability, which sometimes influences the judgement, and always the imagination. (T 3.3.1.20; 585)

When we consider the character of someone whose circumstances prevent their character from realising its "natural tendency" (T 3.3.1.22; 586) we are led by the imagination to consider what the effects would be were the circumstances different.

Hume's solution to the 'virtue in rags' objection makes it seem rather too easy. The easy transition of the imagination implies that we cannot but consider the character

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<sup>266</sup> This has already been alluded to above, p. 167.

<sup>267</sup> Hume often aligns beauty and utility. See, e.g., T 2.1.8.2; 299 & EPM 6.24-5; 244-45.

of someone who fails to do good from mere bad luck as virtuous. But we should be cautious here. As Hume insists, it is necessary to ‘employ much reasoning’<sup>268</sup> in both aesthetics and morals before we feel the correct sentiment. That is, once we have reasoned sufficiently to see the house as ‘contriv’d with great judgement for all the commodities of life’ we easily see it as beautiful. Similarly, it is once we have reasoned sufficiently to see the character as ‘fitted to be beneficial to society’ that we easily see it as being good,<sup>269</sup> despite the lack of actual effects. But it is contained in the very description of the ‘virtue in rags’ case that we have already done the reasoning. The character is said to be ‘no longer’ capable of doing good acts and ‘lost to all the world’. In order for this to be the case we must have already seen the character as being beneficial. All that requires explanation here is the fact that we *do not change* our view when someone is imprisoned and Hume’s easy explanation fits the ease of the case.

It is tempting to suggest that Hume’s way of setting up the case is deficient. He should have set up the case to allow for the possibility of someone who is born into destitution and never has the opportunity to exercise any of her virtues. It is considerably harder in this case to explain how we could so easily apply general rules. But the problems are general epistemological problems. How could we ever learn that such a person was virtuous? If she never exercises her virtues it seems impossible for us to ever know anything about her character. But this is a problem for any account of moral judgement. If we cannot know morally salient facts about the object of judgement we can never come to any reasonable judgement. The way in which the virtue in rags case is set up is such that it explains how we can know someone’s character in a situation which thwarts its expression.<sup>270</sup>

What Hume’s solution to the virtue in rags case does illustrate is the importance of general rules to his account. The general rules that we are able to apply to

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<sup>268</sup> Full passage quoted above, p. 153.

<sup>269</sup> All other things being equal. It will not be easy if the person being judged is, e.g., our enemy.

<sup>270</sup> There is also good reason to suppose that the kind of hypothetical case I’ve just considered is not a cogent possibility. If, as was argued in Chapter Three, character is embedded in the life and society of its possessor, someone who has never had opportunity to express her character is inconceivable.



someone's character facilitate the easy transition from the cause (their character) to the non-actual effect (benefiting their narrow circle). Of course, how easy such a transition is depends on how we interpret Hume on general rules. Ambiguities in his account were discussed in Chapter Two (p. 73). To briefly recap, it would be the case that if we are thinking of GR I then the transition will be easy, since it is just a matter of custom. If we are under the sway of GR I, we may be influenced by incidental features of a person's character. For example, we may come to ignore the personal character in favour of a (hastily attributed) national character. We may, that is, assume that a prisoner will be witless on the grounds that he is an Irishman, without taking care to establish his real character.<sup>271</sup> On the other hand, if we are thinking of GR II as being the general rules involved here, then they will involve some reflection. In Chapter Two it was left ambiguous whether Hume should be read as intending GR II to be beliefs or the process that leads to beliefs. If we suppose them to be beliefs, then in this case they must be well-founded beliefs about the tendencies of particular characters, from which we will easily make the transition to their effects in different circumstances. If we consider GR II to be processes of belief-formation the transition will not be so easy, since our estimation of the character will not be established merely by the tendencies that are immediately suggested to us by custom, but will involve some rational reflection on those suggested tendencies to decide which is the most likely. Hume's description of the process as easy favours the reading of GR II as beliefs, but I will return to the subject shortly to show why this is not the best way to read things.

General points of view thus give us more stable ways of considering people's characters. This allows for a greater stability of sentiment, both by allowing us to adjust our position to consider everyone in terms of their narrow circle and by allowing us to compensate for extreme misfortune. Taking up general points of view is a complex imaginative exercise, which requires practice, reasoning and discernment of circumstances, and general rules, in some sense. It therefore requires

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<sup>271</sup> It is implicit in the account of GR I that we will not be aware of doing this. Indeed, we will probably not be aware of the distinction between national and personal character in this case – since the general rule is 'All Irishmen are witless,' the possibility of a witty Irishman simply does not occur to us. See above, p. 72.

education, habits, natural abilities and general rules, all of which are elements of character. Someone's ability to take up general points of view is a function of their character.

General points of view are also a matter of convention. We do not judge of people by their effect on their narrow circle out of nature: "[A] rude, untaught savage, regulates chiefly his love and hatred by the ideas of private utility and injury." It is only once we have established social conventions that we develop "views of general usefulness and its contrary." When we have such views, "VIRTUE and VICE become then known: Morals are recognized: Certain general ideas are framed of human conduct and behaviour: Such measures are expected from men." (EPM 9.8; 274) The conventions involved in taking general points of view require that we do not consider ourselves. Consequently, the convention excludes any comparison we might be tempted to make between ourselves and the objects of judgement. General points of view thereby exclude the passions of malice and envy by means of convention.<sup>272</sup>

### ***Language and Conversation***

The interpretation I have given of taking general points of view has throughout relied on our feeling actual moral sentiments when we take up the moral point of view. Given that my aim is to show that the moral judge can be modelled on the true judge it is necessary to take this interpretation, as it is certainly the case that our aesthetic judgements must be based upon actual sentiments, but there is another highly-influential way of reading Hume's account of taking up general points of view. On this reading we do not have occurrent moral sentiments from taking up a general point of view, instead, "we understand that our sentiments are influenced by

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<sup>272</sup> John Mackie objects to Hume's distinction between natural and artificial virtues on the grounds of the conventional nature of general points of view, "For it means that his natural virtues are, after all, a further set of artificial virtues." But Mackie mistakes the distinction between natural and artificial virtues here, which is "that the good, which results from the former, arises from every single act," (T 3.3.1.12; 579) rather than that the natural virtues have no relation to conventions or play no important part in social systems. See John L. Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory* (London: Routledge, 1980): 123.

our particular perspectives, and we compensate for our relation to others by considering how we *would* feel when the influence of relations is eliminated.”<sup>273</sup> There is certainly evidence for such a reading. Throughout the discussion of the general point of view Hume is concerned with how we use moral language. Were we unable to correct the variability of sympathy, “’tis impossible we cou’d ever converse together on any reasonable terms.” (T 3.3.1.15; 581) Taking up general points of view provides us with a “method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn or inalterable.” (T 3.3.1.16; 582)<sup>274</sup>

The suggestion that Hume is merely suggesting what we would feel in a given situation is strengthened by some of the sensory analogies he gives in his discussion.

The case is here the same as in our judgments concerning external bodies. All objects seem to diminish by their distance; But tho’ the appearance of objects to our senses be the original standard, by which we judge of them, yet we do not say, that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearance by reflection, arrive at a more constant and establish’d judgment concerning them. (T 3.3.3.2; 603)

If we are perceiving a tree on the horizon we do not think that it is the same size as the bonsai tree on the table next to us. But our visual impression of the tree on the horizon is not experienced as being the larger. The adjustment is made on the basis of experience; we know that if we got closer to the tree it would appear larger to us.<sup>275</sup> The case is similar with adjustments of colour made on the basis of the

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<sup>273</sup> Elizabeth Radcliffe, “Hume on Motivating Sentiments, the General Point of View, and the Inculcation of ‘Morality’,” *Hume Studies* 20, no. 1 (1994): 43. Sayre-McCord gives a similar rendition, see “General Point of View”, 209.

<sup>274</sup> See also T 3.3.1.16; 582, T 3.3.3.2; 603 & EPM 5.43; 229.

<sup>275</sup> This is on Hume’s account of perception, which encourages thought about visual impressions as being two-dimensional images. Our visual organs may be more sophisticated than this suggests, but even so experience is required to give content to such perceptions. Someone from Iceland, where there are few trees and no big ones, may find it difficult to judge the size of some distant Redwoods upon arrival in California for the first time. It is quite natural to suppose that she may judge them to be closer than they are, or at least find it difficult to estimate the distance with any accuracy.

prevailing light conditions: we do not see the red card as red when it is under ultraviolet light, although we might adjust for the light and realise (see that) it is red.<sup>276</sup>

It is certainly not clear that Hume is correct in his worry that we would be unable to converse without coming to agreement on these matters. We are, after all, capable of communicating about a variety of sentiments on which we do not agree and do not demand any such agreement. To borrow Cohon's example, "If I say 'Espresso is delicious' and you say 'Espresso is vile', we have no trouble understanding that what we are doing is revealing divergent felt reactions..." But in this case and others similar, even to the extent of demanding approximate agreement, such as in most exchanges concerning colour, "No grave difficulties of communication threaten us."<sup>277</sup> There are many complexities surrounding this issue, but I think that reading Hume as being specifically concerned with language *per se* here is mistaken. What he is concerned with is not the meaning of terms, but social agreement. We "cou'd never converse... on any reasonable terms," were it not that we could reconcile our sentiments, moral sentiment included, to some degree. It is the "intercourse of sentiments... in society and conversation" that is most important to us, for which we only need a level of agreement "sufficient for discourse," in specific contexts such as "in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools." (T 3.3.3.2; 603)<sup>278</sup>

It is similarly mistaken to see Hume's emphasis on language as suggesting that we do not have actual sentiments when we take up a general point of view. The point of the emphasis on language is to say that we are able to come to sufficient agreement

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<sup>276</sup> This is an extreme case and it is not so clear that we only see *that* in more moderate examples. Consider changing the white balance on a digital camera. The human eye automatically adjusts for colour temperature and most of us do not even realise how different fluorescent light is from natural light on a cloudy day, at least not in our everyday proceedings.

<sup>277</sup> Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 135-36.

<sup>278</sup> William Davie expresses this point nicely by saying that the general point of view "is a useful way of staying on our feet when we talk." See William Davie, "Hume's General Point of View," *Hume Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998): 282.

about people's characters that we are able to meaningfully use words such as 'vice' and 'virtue' as distinct from 'like' and 'dislike'. But this is, on Hume's view, dependent upon our achieving a significant degree of shared sentiment in the first place. It is only a small amount of difference that can be glossed over by language, not widespread disagreement, and the level of agreement required can only be achieved by actual sentiments communicated through sympathy, not language.<sup>279</sup> I am again in agreement with Cohon on this matter. She writes,

These passages do not say that there are times when we adopt or attempt to adopt the common point of view but we feel *nothing* as a result. All they say is that when we imagine ourselves in the common point of view, we sometimes fail to *change* our initial sentiments to match the sentiments of that station.<sup>280</sup>

When we consider something from a general point of view it gives rise to an actual pleasure. This moral sentiment will be a weak, calm passion, but is open to being strengthened by other moral sentiments. This means that over time it will become the prevalent passion. However, in some cases, either those in which our personal interest is very strong or circumstances which are too far removed from our normal experience for the moral sentiment to be sufficiently reinforced, the moral sentiment will be weaker than other sentiments, preventing it from correcting them. Even in these cases we have an occurrent moral sentiment and it is possible to fix on that sentiment when we use language. This is a matter of the convention established by the kind of language that we are using, i.e. moral language. There is nothing in this convention that guarantees that we will successfully apply it. It is still difficult for us to distinguish between someone's being our enemy and her good qualities, but provided we take up a general point of view we at least have the resources available for us to apply the convention and hence to correct our language, even when we are

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<sup>279</sup> For this reason, I reject Elizabeth Radcliffe's suggestion that "Hume's theory is quite plausibly read as a theory about how the *genesis* of our basic moral *concepts* lies in our human nature without committing him to the claim that there is a one-to-one correspondence between each individual's judgments and that individual's *own* feelings... [I]ndividuals who... have never felt genuine moral approbation can acquire moral notions through education." See Radcliffe, "Hume on Motivating Sentiments," 48-9. It is important to note that this quotation comes from the middle of Radcliffe's paper and she refines her account in the latter half of the paper.

<sup>280</sup> Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, 139.

unable to correct our other sentiments.

### ***One or Many?***

As a final detail of the general point of view it is worth considering whether it is a single point of view or a general description of potentially multiple points of view. On some readings this is a non-question: if Hume's moral judge is an ideal observer, as Ronald Glossop and Timothy Costelloe take him to be, then there is only one general point of view.<sup>281</sup> Cohon strongly implies that she thinks Hume is expressing a singular perspective when she explains her preference for the *Enquiry* expression 'common point of view':

I prefer it to the term 'general point of view', more widely used in the secondary literature, because it better captures what Hume has in mind, which is not some sort of generalization or abstraction but rather a commonly accessible but intimate perspective. Also, Hume himself never uses the term 'general point of view' in the singular.<sup>282</sup>

As already argued, I agree with Cohon that when Hume talks of 'general and steady points of view' he is referring to 'a commonly accessible but intimate perspective', but for exactly this reason I think that Hume cannot think of general points of view as singular. Taking up an intimate perspective on someone's character involves considering the effect of her character on her narrow circle. But such a perspective is tied into the type of narrow circle that she occupies, which is dependent upon the society in which she lives and her station within it. The narrow circle of an ordinary citizen is considerably narrower than that of a politician; the narrow circle of a Greek man will include very few women, while that of a Roman will include many

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<sup>281</sup> Ronald J. Glossop, "The Nature of Hume's Ethics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 27, no. 4 (1967) & Costelloe, *Aesthetics and Morals*, 32-6. I have not discussed the ideal observer reading of Hume's general point of view for two reasons. First, Sayre-McCord's arguments against it seem to me to be conclusive. Second, I am arguing that the moral judge can be modelled on the true judge and I have already argued that the true judge is not ideal. It will therefore follow, if my case is well made, that the moral judge is not ideal either. Of course, my view is in theory vulnerable to the counterargument that if the moral judge is ideal and the true judge is not then the moral judge cannot be adequately modelled on the true judge.

<sup>282</sup> Cohon, *Hume's Morality*, p. 132n.

(EPM 'A Dialogue' 43-50; 338-40).

To some extent, my view corresponds with that of Sayre-McCord, who argues,

Exactly how narrow a narrow circle is to be considered depends upon the trait in question. If considering, for instance, whether someone is a good friend, the circle relevant to this evaluation is quite tightly circumscribed, whereas if we are asking whether someone is a good statesman we consult "the good or ill, which results to his own country from his measures and councils," and we do this "without regard to the prejudice which he brings on its enemies and rivals."<sup>283</sup>

It is important to observe that while Sayre-McCord is quite right to suggest that the perspective circumscribed by 'narrow circle' is dependent on what is in question, he is wrong to suppose that the question is only one of the trait concerned. At the very point from which Sayre-McCord is quoting (EPM 5.38n; 225n), Hume says that we evaluate "In proportion to the station which a man possesses, according to the relations in which he is placed." What is in question is the character of the person we are judging, and that character has to be understood relative to the person's influence and position in society. This is not to say that we cannot consider whether a statesman is a good friend, in which case we may only consider quite a small group of intimates in the narrow circle. But even when assessing the friendships of a great statesman, we may need to consider a wider circle than normal. Hume comments in his character of Sir Robert Walpole, "He is a generous friend." But a few lines later it becomes clear that this is not altogether a good thing for a statesman, when Hume adds, "His ministry has been more advantageous to his family than to the public." (Essays 576)

As I intimated above, the perspective will also need to be tailored to the society in which the person lives. Sayre-McCord is, once again, helpful. When we take up a general point of view, we sympathise with a range of responses to a set of "morally relevant problems." Which problems belong to this set

depends partly on the nature of sympathy, but partly too on the distinctive focus

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<sup>283</sup> Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Hume and the Bauhaus Theory of Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20 (1995): 295.

our actual interests give to the general point of view. What focus this is will be... a reflection of what sort of problems have become collectively salient... Various features of the human frame and condition virtually guarantee that a core set of problems will always be collectively salient... Yet differing circumstances may also serve to highlight, or to shield us from, other problems.<sup>284</sup>

The general point of view that we select depends on both generally human problems and upon features of the social order in which the person whose character we are judging is situated.

What is general about general points of view is that they can, in principle, be taken up by anyone. The requirements for taking up a general point of view do not depend upon being in a particular position, e.g. being part of a person's narrow circle or even part of their society. But just as the freedom from prejudice requirement for the true judge requires appreciation of the intended audience's "particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices," (Essays 239) taking up a general point of view requires "indulgence for the manners and customs of different ages." As Hume says, "Would you try a Greek or Roman by the common law of England? Hear him defend himself by his own maxims; and then pronounce." (EPM 'A Dialogue' 18; 330)

In Chapter Four, I argued that the best way to understand the knowledge required for freedom from prejudice involved GR II. To correctly appreciate a work of art requires knowledge of the expectations and habits of a particular audience, but such knowledge must be regulated to allow for the possibility of variation. Something similar is true for assessing character. We must have knowledge of the expectations and habits, that is to say, the conventions, of a particular society in order to evaluate, or even understand, the characters of people in that society. As our expectations may impose themselves upon a work of art, preventing us from seeing it for what it really is, our expectations can lead us to misinterpret the motivation, and hence the character, lying behind particular actions.

If any material circumstance be yet unknown or doubtful, we must first employ our inquiry or intellectual faculties to ensure ourselves of it; and must suspend for

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<sup>284</sup> Sayre-McCord, "Bauhaus Theory of Ethics," p. 291.



a time all moral decision and sentiment. While we are ignorant, whether a man were aggressor or not, how can we determine whether the person, who killed him, be criminal or innocent? (EPM App. 1.11; 290)

Knowing the expectations of a society is not sufficient; we must know all circumstances. But while this is an easy enough caveat to apply in theory, it is not so easy to apply in practice. How are we to know that we know all the relevant material circumstances? If we learn that someone has killed his father we are likely to feel disapprobation, but upon learning that the man is Oedipus and was not aware that the man was his father we may be more inclined to feel some degree of compassion (EPM App. 1.12; 290-91). There is nothing that can guarantee our knowing all material circumstances, anymore than there is anything to guarantee that the true judge will not make an error, or that someone suffering from toothache will not be unusually peevish.<sup>285</sup> What is required is a moral judge who is aware of conventions and judges according to them, but does not slavishly follow them and allows for the possibility that someone's actions may be motivated by a character that includes some elements that render it more than just a product of its society.

It is for this reason that GR II are best not understood as being beliefs which are the outcome of a reflective process but as the process itself. Judging character requires attention to all the particulars of the case, making sensitive judgements concerning them, and being constantly aware that one may be lacking in some details. This sort of reflective attention to one's current knowledge and situation is best captured through the conception of GR II as a reflective, regulative attention than as a set of principles, however sophisticated such principles are supposed to be.

## **Moral Judge as a Character**

In this chapter, I have argued that the moral judge can be modelled after the template provided by the true judge in aesthetics. The moral judge needs to have delicacy, practice, comparison and good sense, in a way very similar to the true judge. The additional complications in the case of the moral judge have been shown

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<sup>285</sup> See above, p. 147.

to be surmountable. Freedom from prejudice cannot remain in the case of the moral judge, or rather it cannot remain in the way Hume characterises it in the aesthetics. The general point of view can be seen to play a very similar role, in that it selects a particular perspective from which we are able to make our judgements from the many available.

In Chapter Four, I argued that the five qualities listed in the character specification of the true judge are intertwined (p. 143). The same is true of the moral judge. The initial delicacy of sentiment needs to be cultivated through practice and comparison. Practice and comparison are required in order to take up a general point of view, not least because such a point of view will need to take account of various social conventions. The reasoning that is required through good sense will be reasoning concerning social conventions and the situation of the person being judged. This may involve general rules, and for the judgement to be a fair one, these had better be GR II, which involve an element of good sense. The character of the moral judge is just as complex and composite as the character of the true judge.

Once again, it is not reasonable to separate out the elements that contribute to making a good moral judge into individual character traits, such that someone could possess some of them but not others. Being practiced involves being able to make comparisons. Being able to make comparisons, in the relevant sense, involves being able to take up a general point of view. But in most cases, our ability to do these things is going to fall short of the level required to be a truly excellent judge of character. This does not imply that the moral judge is in any way ideal, i.e. that she possesses each of the elements to perfection, since it is not intelligible to talk of perfections here. Perfection in terms of practice or comparison makes no more sense than in the case of the true judge. Perfection in reaching the general point of view is equally suspect. First, taking up general points of view requires practice and practice is something of which one could always have more. Second, there is not one general point of view, but multiple different points of view according to the society and the person's position within it.

Someone possessing all the elements of the moral judge's character will, like the

true judge, be able to judge ‘without danger of mistake’. That is to say, the moral judge will normally get judgements of character correct, or she will be aware of the inadequacy of her feelings to constitute true moral judgements owing to deficiencies in her knowledge and she will therefore withhold judgement. This is not to say that a moral judge might not get things wrong occasionally; moral judges are no more ideal than true judges. But in the case of the moral judge the suggestion that she is ideal is even less appealing than in the case of aesthetic judgement. In order for moral judgements to be a practical possibility it is necessary that a large proportion of people are able to feel moral sentiments a significant amount of the time. This entails that we are able, through the practice that we get in everyday life, as well as the knowledge we develop of the conventions of our own society, if not that of others, to make reasonably accurate moral judgements. Radcliffe expresses this thought well when she writes, “Our sentiments still count as moral sentiments as long as they approximate to those that would be felt by one who does sympathize, unaffected by personal connections, with the narrow circle of the agent.” In other words, provided we approximate closely enough to a moral judge we still have genuinely moral sentiments. “How closely they must approximate to such feelings is difficult to say.”<sup>286</sup> But construing the moral judge as ideal would not help to resolve this issue. As Sayre-McCord argues,

Our estimates of the Ideal Observer’s view of the effects of someone’s character will differ in exactly the way our judgments of the actual effects differ... No longer each speaking from her own peculiar point of view, each would still be speaking from her own peculiar take on a point of view she could not possibly occupy.<sup>287</sup>

Both Radcliffe and Sayre-McCord have their own accounts of how such approximation may take place, and both differ from mine, not least in that they rely on hypothetical sentiments rather than actual sentiments, but on my view it is possible to give a character specification of the moral judge and thus to detail ways in which we can come to approximate to the moral judge more precisely.

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<sup>286</sup> Radcliffe, “Motivating Sentiments,” p. 52.

<sup>287</sup> Sayre-McCord, “General Point of View,” p. 218.

# Conclusion

Over the preceding five chapters I have sought to establish two principal theses. The first is that character, on Hume's account, consists of heterogeneous elements, including passions, habits, natural abilities and possibly general rules. All of these elements are real properties of their possessor, rather than being the projections of spectators. Although identifying character with a heterogeneous collection of elements has the disadvantage of being relatively complex, I argued that the elements of character can be seen to be analogous to Hume's famous description of the mind as a "bundle or collection of different perceptions." (T 1.4.6.4; 252) Although the elements form a bundle, they can be understood as forming a unified character once character is seen in its social context. Hume's social philosophy places emphasis on the various conventions that are developed in order for a stable society to be achieved and maintained. A stable society provides a regular and predictable pattern to life, which, in turn, allows people to pursue long-term projects, the success or failure of which are also determined by conventions. These features of society allow character both to develop, owing to the long-term stability of conditions, and to be revealed, through the criteria of success and failure established through conventions.

The second thesis is that the character of the judge is just as central to Hume's philosophy as the character of the judged. Hume's use of the doctrine of secondary qualities as an analogy for virtue, vice, beauty and deformity makes it tempting to think of character as existing in the mind of the observer, rather than it being a real property of its possessor. However, Hume's aesthetics and morals both place judges at the centre of the theory. These judges are understood by Hume as being *characters* of a specified kind. Therefore it is not possible to understand character as something in the mind of the observer, who then projects it in some way onto those she observes, since she must have a certain kind of character in order to judge characters appropriately. Hume is explicit that character is the object of moral judgement, but the character of the judge is just as important, despite Hume's failure to make the point as explicitly as he might. I explored and developed this

thesis through a detailed analysis of the character of the true judge in Hume's aesthetics. The character specification of the true judge can then be used, with suitable modifications, as a template for the moral judge.

The two theses are mutually supporting. The reality of the heterogeneous elements of the first thesis is threatened by the temptation to regard character as the mere projection of an observer. The first thesis is protected from this threat by the second thesis. The second thesis shows that the characters of judges in Hume's aesthetics and morals are conceived in terms of the heterogeneous elements endorsed by the first thesis.

In the course of establishing these main theses I have established some subsidiary theses. The first of these was that any interpretation of Hume on character needs to fulfil three conditions:

- The Metaphysical Condition – Character is a real property of its possessor, not of spectators.
- The Epistemological Condition – Character must be knowable, but not so easily known that there is no possibility of puzzlement or mistake.
- The Practical Condition – Character must be of practical use, which entails that the methods by which it is known must be accessible to ordinary people, even though specialists may be required to arbitrate in difficult cases.

These three conditions were established initially by examination of Hume's core discussion of character in the sections concerning the question 'Of Liberty and Necessity'. These are certainly not the only conditions that an interpretation of Hume on character must fulfil – durability was explicitly mentioned as an additional condition (p. 35) – but they are interesting and substantial conditions. They are interesting and substantial on the grounds that they are not immediately obvious, but close attention to them demonstrates the implausibility (or impracticality) of possible interpretations of Hume's account. Only one such demonstration was explicitly undertaken, that of John Bricke's account, although the first half of Chapter Three amounts to a defence of the metaphysical condition and therefore a refutation of Costelloe's account of Hume on character that dispenses with that

condition.<sup>288</sup>

Another subsidiary thesis I have argued for is that Hume is more interested in characters as a whole than in traits. This is not to say that we cannot use ‘character-trait-names’<sup>289</sup> but that we should resist the temptation to identify character traits with the elements established by my first thesis. This contention is supported by the fact that Hume’s actual character sketches, whether of types or of individuals, embed characters thoroughly in the life of their possessor, such that the supposed traits are in no way loose from one another. This relates to the first thesis in that the elements of character are not to be identified in any systematic way with ordinary character-trait-names. In my exploration of the second thesis it became apparent that there is significant overlap between different elements and the way they contribute to characters. The character specifications of the true judge and the moral judge were both found to involve intertwined elements, such that Hume’s listing of “strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice,” (Essays 241) should be understood to give an abstract specification of a complex character rather than a list of five separate qualities.

This opens up a possible direction for future research. If elements are understood as existing independently of their identification with a specific character trait then any particular element may contribute to more than one aspect of someone’s character. For example, as I suggested in Chapter Five (p. 155), delicacy of sentiment for both the true judge and the moral judge is a kind of uncultivated sensitivity to the calm passions. It might then be possible to conclude from the fact that someone was a true judge that they were naturally suited to be a moral judge. This inference would be defeasible on the grounds that there may be other elements involved with someone’s being a true judge that interfered with their being a moral judge,<sup>290</sup> but

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<sup>288</sup> I have not discussed any examples of accounts that fail the epistemological condition. One such account is that of Clarence S. Johnson, “Hume on Character.”

<sup>289</sup> See above, p. 59.

<sup>290</sup> Hume comes very close to claiming that being a good aesthetic judge qualifies someone as a good moral judge towards the end of ‘Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion’ (Essays 7-8). This claim is

there is a clear possibility that the one element could contribute to both characters.

Further research along these lines might yield interesting results beyond the narrowly exegetical scope that this thesis has taken. In the Introduction I mentioned current controversies concerning situationism and in particular the work of John Doris (p. 7). Doris argues against what he calls ‘globalism’ about character, a central tenet of which is “*Evaluative integration*. In a given character... the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences.”<sup>291</sup> That is to say, if we know that someone is honest (good valence) then they are more likely to be generous (good valence). Doris rejects this view of character, “rather than... evaluatively integrated personality structures, [research] suggests instead *fragmented* personality structures – evaluatively *disintegrated* associations of multiple local traits.”<sup>292</sup>

Hume’s conception of character shows promise for responding to Doris’ criticisms of character. His character sketches, as was shown in Chapter Three (p. 97), do not exhibit a high degree of evaluative integration. The sketch of Charles I shows his character to be “mixed,” in which respect Hume likens it to “that of most men, if not all men.” (H 5:542) The more abstract character of soldiers, while being mostly approbatory in tone, combines the epithets ‘brave,’ ‘idle,’ ‘honest,’ ‘thoughtless,’ and ‘ignorant’. (Essays 199) Hume is not committed to evaluative integration, as Doris describes it. But if the possibility I outlined above of a single element contributing to more than one aspect of a person’s character can be made good, then it might be possible to resist the radical move of only allowing Doris’ “extremely fine-grained” local traits.<sup>293</sup> To put things succinctly, Hume’s conception of

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not explicitly repeated and ‘Delicacy of Taste and Passion’ is an early essay, but Hume never withdrew the essay or amended the claim. For a discussion of how there may be overlap between the true judge and the moral judge in Hume’s philosophy, see Jacqueline Taylor, “Hume on Beauty and Virtue,” in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth S. Radcliffe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

<sup>291</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22.

<sup>292</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 25.

<sup>293</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*, 25.

character on my interpretation suggests the possibility of making an interesting response to the situationist challenge by rejecting evaluative integration while holding on to a genuinely character-based account of ethics and human behaviour in general.

As a closing remark, it is necessary to acknowledge an assumption: I have, throughout, treated Hume as consistent throughout his works, from the early, obviously philosophical, *Treatise*, to the later, more literary, *History*. This is definitely an assumption on my part; I have made no attempt to prove Hume's consistency. I do not deny that there are differences between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* that are more substantial than Hume's suggestion that they are more in "the manner than the matter" (Essays xxxv), although I have no systematic account of what such differences may be. Yet I have found no evidence that there is any significant difference in Hume's thinking on *character* through his works.

Whatever other changes there may be between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* or between these more obviously philosophical works and his more literary *Essays* and *History* the fact that his conception of character appears the same throughout lends a welcome unity to Hume's work. His anatomy of character assists his painting of characters: "In vain would we exalt the one by depreciating the other." (EHU 1.8; 10)

I have argued that Hume conceives of character, throughout his works, as consisting of heterogeneous elements, including passions, habits, natural abilities and possibly general rules. These elements are unified by the social context in which they are developed and revealed, through the mechanisms of social conventions. Judges are central to Hume's aesthetics and ethics; they are therefore central to the judgement of character. But judges are also to be understood as complying with a character specification. These character specifications are developed in terms of the heterogeneous elements of character. Hume's conception of character is highly complex and extends to a wide range of applications, but the account is nonetheless coherent.



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